ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PASSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Suzanne Rachel Borenzweig
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Dissertation Directed By: Professor Francine Hultgren
Department of Education Policy Studies

This study explores the lived experiences of Advanced Placement English teachers in public school high school. Max van Manen's methodology for hermeneutic phenomenological research establishes the framework for the inquiry. The writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Greene provide philosophical grounding throughout the research process. The work of curricular theorists elucidates possibilities for understanding the experiences of Advanced Placement English teachers, as I address the question: "What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?"

Six Advanced Placement teachers engage with the researcher in conversations about being with students in the Advanced Placement English classroom. The teachers also reflect on their practice through a series of shared journal entries. The teachers, five women and one man, range in age from 25 to 45 years, and have between 2 and 10 years experience teaching Advanced Placement English. The phenomenological text constructed from conversations and written reflections brings forth aspects of the experience of dwelling aright in the Zone of Between in AP English teaching: between

teaching and testing, high school and college, and childhood and adulthood. The teachers approach their work as master-craftspeople in the classroom-workshop, passing on to their student-apprentices the proper use of tools in the art and craft of reading, writing, thinking, and test-taking in the AP English classroom. As teachers prepare students for the College Board exam, they also embrace, question, and innovate around aspects of the test. The teachers use the exam as a foundation for courage and encouragement, confidence and passion building, and creative ways-of-being with students.

The study suggests a need for Advanced Placement teachers to participate in the development of curriculum, to retain the autonomy to teach from the self, and to be trusted to provide students with meaningful experiences in the art and craft of literature study. The study also reveals the importance of widening the narrow definition of student achievement to include more than test scores. Finally, the study recommends an inquiry-based project approach to assessment to expand the notion of teaching with passion for possibility in the Advanced Placement English classroom.

PASSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

By

Suzanne Rachel Borenzweig

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Francine Hultgren, Advisor and Chair
Professor Barbara Bass
Professor Steven Selden
Professor Wayne Slater
Professor Linda Valli

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CHAPTER ONE:
STANZAS AND SCANTRONS—OPENING SPACES OF PASSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

Appreciating "This Stuff"

It is one week before the Advanced Placement (AP) Literature exam. All class activities and concerns now focus on our last-minute preparations for the College Board test on Monday. We are reviewing a multiple-choice practice on the poem "A Whippoorwill in the Woods" by Amy Clampitt (see Appendix A). It's a lengthy poem, eleven stanzas, and my student Molly asks if she should read the poem before she begins to answer the multiple choice questions that follow. I let my forehead fall to my desk with a dramatic thud: "Have I taught you nothing?"

Student Julia comes to Molly's defense, "That's what we learned in SAT Prep. You don't need to read the whole passage—there's no time."

"How can you possibly appreciate the poem," I ask, "if you don't read it?"

Molly responds in earnest, "Are we really supposed to appreciate this stuff?"

This stuff? A school year of some of the most wonderful poems, plays, and novels reduced to adolescent vernacular as "this stuff." I feign horror and disbelief, but inside I feel torn about what to tell her, and disappointed in what she may have learned from me in our class. I assure Molly and her classmates that they do indeed have time to read and appreciate the literature on which they are being tested. But during my commute home later, I will mull over this exchange and acknowledge that Molly and Julia may have been right: there is not a whole lot of time to appreciate literature during a grueling three-hour high-stakes exam. Have I been complicit in their understanding of literature-as-test-fodder and nothing more? Their parents pay $86.00 per AP test and want to see the big

pay off: early college credit at bargain basement prices. Their children are, for the most part, well behaved and eager-to-please; they want to score-off-the-charts, across-the-board. I admit that sometimes I teach to the test. And I have one more confession—I don't teach to the test nearly as often as I should.

AP English teachers are caught in the tension between teaching a rich and engaging college-level introductory English course to high school students, and preparing those same students to earn a score of 4 or 5 on a three-hour standardized test in early May. Some might argue that the two are not mutually exclusive; that the skills needed to do well on the test are the very skills one needs to study and understand literature. But Molly's question and Julia's defense attest to the effect of such testing on our teaching and learning. Molly and Julia are top students who would only take short cuts to improve their performance. Swiftness in reading, thinking, and writing is tantamount to doing well on the AP Lit exam. Both Molly and Julia are depending on me to help them. What is it like to prepare students for a standardized test while simultaneously trying to engage them in meaningful experiences of literature and writing? Are the two goals even reconcilable?

After Molly and Julia's questions about reading “A Whippoorwill in the Woods,” we had time to conduct a little English experiment. As a class we tried to answer the questions without reading the poem first. It proved impossible. The whole class agreed that the best strategy was to read the entire poem or passage, and then answer the questions. It marked a victory for me, albeit a tiny one; I was convinced that Molly, Julia and many of their classmates still wouldn't “appreciate this stuff” because there wasn't enough time. What is the AP English teachers’ experience of engaging students with

literature that always comes with standardized test questions attached? What is it like to engage students with literature that imposes time restrictions? Can the world of literature and the world of corporate testing co-exist?

Turning to the Test

The Advanced Placement Literature exam, as designed and implemented by the College Board, takes three hours to complete: one hour for 60 multiple choice questions on two poems and two prose passages, and two hours for three essay questions. The time constraints make an already difficult test even more challenging and less indicative of a student's ability to analyze and write about literature. In our daily high school classes, we prepare for the test by becoming familiar with the exam's format and content, but we also prepare by engaging with literature through reading, thinking, speaking and writing. The students may be correct in their assessment that there is little time in the mix for true appreciation.

And what is *true appreciation?* The Latin root *appretit* is to set a price to, as in appraisal. Are we back to our $86.00 registration fee? Or the three college credits? Other shades of meaning of *appreciation* include “to perceive the full force of,” “to be sensitive to…any delicate impression or distinction” and “to find worth or excellence in” (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). An appreciation of “Whippoorwill in the Woods,” *Hamlet*, or *Their Eyes Were Watching God* would encompass the definition’s more unquantifiable aspects: full force, delicate impressions, distinctions, excellence.

I turn to the phenomenon of the lived experience of teaching AP Literature as a way of being with students, literature and writing in the high school classroom. Although much has been written about how to prepare the students for the exams, including how to

structure the course and how to choose texts, little exists on what it is like for teachers to teach Advanced Placement English. English teachers in AP classrooms tend to be passionate about their subject matter and committed to providing their students with college-level course work in a high school setting. For much of the school year, the specter of the exam looms like Catherine Earnshaw's ghost outside Lockwood's window during his first slumber party at Wuthering Heights. What is it like for an English teacher to foster an appreciation of literature and writing to students who want to write three polished essays in two hours? How does dwelling in the tension affect teachers' passion and engagement?

Turning to the Tension

The earliest use of the English word *tension* derives from the 16th century Latin medical term as the physiological condition of "being stretched and strained" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). We think of being stretched as a positive state: warming up before the big race, raising arms to the sky in a yogic sun salute, or beckoning ourselves and our students to stretch intellectual muscles. But with stretch may come strain, both physical strain and the psychological strain "produced by anxiety, need, or by a sense of mental, emotional, or physical disequilibrium." Today's AP English teachers may find themselves unbalanced as they tread the sometime crooked paths between teaching a close classroom community of learners and sending them off for the anonymity of a national, corporate standardized test.

Heidegger writes, "That *about which Angst* is anxious reveals itself as that *for which* it is anxious: being-in-the-world…For as attunement, anxiousness is a fundamental mode of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 176). The Heideggerian view

that "attunement reveals 'how one is'" may lead us to understand AP English teachers' anxiety as "an '*uncanny*' feeling" which Heidegger names as "not-being-at-home" (p. 176). Are AP English teachers caught in the web of tension between being-at-home in the comfort of their English classrooms and the-not-being-at-home of the testing site, where their very physical presence is prohibited? Heidegger writes:

> Entangled flight *into* the being-at-home of publicness is flight *from* not-being-at-home, that is, from the uncanniness which lies in Da-sein as thrown, as being-in-the-world entrusted to itself in its being…Angst can arise in the most harmless situations….The everydayness of this fleeing, however, shows phenomenally that Angst as a fundamental kind of attunement belongs to the essential constitution of Da-sein of being-in-the-world which, as an existential one, is never objectively present, but itself always in the mode of factical Da-sein, that is, in the mode of an attunement…*Not-being-at-home must be conceived existentially and ontologically as the more primordial phenomenon*. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 177)

The Heideggerian usage of *Da-sein* refers to Being as questioned, undefined, and in the process-of-becoming-known: "This being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its being we formulate terminologically as Da-sein" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 6). My inquiry into the lived experience of AP English teachers relies on the "presupposed" notion of Being as related to "the question of being itself" (Heidegger, p. 7). In studying a group of AP English teachers I follow the Heideggerian idea that, "The totality of beings can, with respect to its various domains, become the field where particular areas of knowledge are explained and delineated" (p. 7). I open up the particular tensions that arise for teachers in the AP English classroom.

In the realm of AP English, the everyday physical presence of an AP English teacher in the classroom with her students marks a being-at-home; the once a year not-being-at-home of testing may be named as an important aspect of the phenomenon. The ever-present specter of the test throughout the school year may create an Angst for

teachers and students alike, as the more familiar daily English class is guided by the dictates of the College Board exam, and the test is ubiquitous. Is AP teaching synonymous with AP testing? Does test practice bring the not-home of the testing site into the home of the classroom? Does the connection between teaching and testing or learning and testing turn what Heidegger names a "harmless situation" into a harmful situation? Finally, what does the experience of teaching AP English teach us about vigorous, rigorous and humane pedagogy in an age of high stakes testing?

The Call of the Horizon

Once a highly selective course for a chosen few, Advanced Placement Literature currently enjoys open enrollment, and is available to any Montgomery County, Maryland high school senior who registers for it. For many students, the requirements—the reading load, writing expectations, and the final exam—are a stretch and perhaps a strain. For others, who may have been identified as gifted early in their school careers, or who have shown promise in their English courses in their later years, the class remains a challenge and a high score on the test may still appear as a lofty goal. Many students who register for AP see on their horizon a passing score on the College Board exam in the spring. Their teachers foresee some students passing and some not, but also envision on the horizon a textured, engaging literary experience for all students.

Finding the Far Horizon

The image of the horizon appears often in literature and in philosophy. In AP Lit, I love to teach the 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, which opens with this metaphorical image:

> Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. (Hurston, 1937/1998, p. 1)

Hurston's horizon represents the possibilities within and beyond reach. As the novel progresses the horizon motif continues, with Janie deciding to elope with Joe. Even though Joe doesn't fit Janie's notion of idealized love, she accepts his offer of the "far horizon" as he whisks her away from her provincial farm life with first husband Logan Killicks (Hurston, 1937/1998, p. 29). At the novel's finish, when Janie's journey comes to an end, she expresses her contentment: "Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons" (p. 191). Janie's growth into an experienced woman, takes her beyond her horizon, and back home as a changed and thoughtful adult. Finally, the novel's last three sentences demonstrate that Janie has indeed lived her life as an autonomous woman, reaching a rare and delicious self-satisfaction:

> Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (Hurston, 1937/1998, p. 193)

In daily parlance, we often use the horizon to connote our goals and our dreams for the future, which may or may not be attainable or realistic. For Janie, her adolescent notion of romantic love is transformed as she gains experience with men, with adulthood, and with the world. Janie's relationship with Tea Cake may not meet the dreams of her youth, but he comes closer than anyone does, and that turns out to be good enough for the 40-something Janie.

What are AP teachers and their students catching in their great fish-nets? What wholeness, satisfaction, or peace do teachers and students glean from their work

together? Is a high test score food for the soul, a trophy catch from an intellectual journey, or an affirmation of life? Is a high test score merely an academic shortcut and an economic venture: relatively inexpensive college credits for students and hefty profits for the non-profit College Board? To begin to address these questions, we must sail closer to the horizon.

Advancing Toward the Horizon

Our horizon in AP, aside from its appearance as a motif in literature, features a big test with its attendant dreams of academic success and advanced college credit. The horizon also encompasses the hopes of the AP teacher that her students will pass the test, but not before benefiting from the class experiences with literature, discussion and writing. Gadamer writes of the Husserlian concept of the horizon: "Every experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally fuses with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form a unified flow of experience" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 245). What our students bring with them when they enter our classrooms and what we hope they take with them to the testing site and beyond, become inextricable and essential parts of our shared horizons in AP English. Gadamer also makes the important distinction that "A horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further" (p. 245). *To advance further* is implicit in our course title: Advanced Placement English. An obsolete definition of the verb *to advance* is "to move forward in place" with an attendant reflexive form "to move (oneself) forward" (*OED Online,* 1989/2008). Our students not only strive to get ahead—college credits for high school course work—but their very presence on the AP roster gives them *advanced* standing; they are placed beyond where they are as high school

juniors and seniors. Their teachers, too, while inhabiting a high school classroom, don the role of college professor as they teach students college-level material in hopes of preparing them for a college-level exam that may exempt them from introductory English and rhetoric courses in college.

Meeting the Horizon of the Other

What do AP English teachers bring to their horizons? Teachers' past experiences with literature are a key part of what forms the teachers' authentic selves: reading, writing, interpreting, and a passion for the "literary arts" in a variety of forms. A common past for many AP teachers would be college experiences with the study of literature, and a common present for teachers can be understood in terms of teaching college-level English courses to high school students in high school classrooms. How, then, do they meet the horizon of the other, the horizon of their students? Gadamer offers this response: "To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 305). As we AP English teachers were once English students ourselves, and as we learned to struggle with close reading analysis and textual interpretation, so must we struggle to "read" our students. In learning to "read" our students, and in particular to read our students' reading through discussion and writing—how they approach and interpret the difficult texts of what the College Board deems "meritorious literature"—so must we cast wide our nets to include our students' Being. Gadamer writes, "The horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past" (p. 306). Our pasts—as students and as teachers—fuse with our students' present and together we achieve what Gadamer names "the fusion of the horizons" (p. 306). The

obvious tensions that arise when fusing the horizons of teacher and student hearken back to Molly, who wants to answer the test questions without reading the poem first, and become one focus of the multi-faceted hermeneutic task to explore the experience of teaching AP English.

Defining the Horizon

The word horizon is derived from the Greek for bounding circle *(OED Online,* 1989/2008). Bounding suggests confinement, while the circle can refer to a never-ending or repeating process of connection, a cycle or renewal. In a sense, bounding circle might be considered paradoxical, and this paradox of a confined renewal can apply to the experience of teaching AP. The bounding circle is a signifier of the "confined renewal" that AP teachers find themselves in year after year as they prepare yet another sea of new faces to achieve on a high-stakes standardized test. Teachers certainly live the bounding circle as another school year ends and we begin again with a new group of students. Each September we meet a new sea of faces, and are charged with the mission of guiding them from where they are to where we think they should be. Our final destination is not so much a point in time or space or knowledge, but more a developmental stage in their lives. We as AP teachers take high school seniors to a place in their study of literature and composition that is supposed to be more college than high school, though we never leave the public school building. When viewing the bounding circle as connection rather than confinement, we can use the notion of the hermeneutic circle—the process of interpretation to consider "the movement of understanding [as] constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 291). The connection for us as AP teachers includes the process of meeting "whole" students where they are and

moving them in a “taking a-part” way where they need to go in a transformative “making whole.” This circularity bespeaks a personal, experiential connection among teachers and students, as teachers take students back to postsecondary experiences with literature.

An obsolete definition of the word *horizon* is the "dividing line between two regions of being" *(OED Online,* 1989/2008). Indeed, for the students there is their high school being-in-the-world and their college being-in-the-world, as well as the world of the test and the world of engaged literature study. What different ways of being might the world of the test and the world of engaged study entail? The question refers to both being and place. There is a clear distinction between the world of the test and the world of engaged literature study. If I measure student success through engagement, commitment, conversation, and passion, and not through standardized test scores, am I shirking my responsibility as an AP English teacher? How can teachers reconcile teaching and learning with teaching and learning to take a test? Are the realms so disparate as to be irreconcilable?

The horizon of the AP English teacher features a college-level English experience and a respectable slew of fours and fives on the College Board exam. Some of us may go back as far as our own favorite high school and college teachers to replicate the structure and content of the classes we once took ourselves as students. For others, our search for pedagogical passion and sound test preparation is akin to Janie's quest for the pear tree or perfect love. We may become, as Hurston's narrator remarks, destined "to sail forever on the horizon" as we hope to realize certain possibilities and potentialities in our students (Hurston, 1937/1998, p. 1).

Fusing the Horizons

Hans-Georg Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" offer us an alternative understanding and an increased hope (Moran, 2000, p. 252). As Gadamer "oppose[s] the view that these horizons are mutually exclusive or that our world-views are hermetically sealed" (Moran, 2000, p. 252), we can begin to align our visions of an intellectually rich literary environment with students who are engaged, enlightened and at the same time, in the process of preparing to meet the challenges set forth by the College Board. Our pedagogical mindfulness can encompass what we know and love as teachers of English, with a commitment to our students' desires to prepare for a three-hour exam toward the end of the school year. With understanding, passion, and compassion, we who teach AP English may help our students, like Janie, pull in their horizons like the great fish nets of the world and revel with contentment in their contents: a lifelong affinity with and love of literature.

Taking the Big Step

Many of us who teach AP have stories to tell of how we came to this place in our careers. It tends to be a momentous arrival, a milestone of sorts when we are asked to teach the most challenging English course to the top students in our schools. We may find ourselves closer to what brought us to teaching in the first place: the novels, plays and poems that played such formative roles in our lives once again become part of our everyday work lives. The level of writing we can expect from our students, the respite from behavioral and attendance issues, the lively and engaging discussion of literature and ideas bring back our college and graduate school days and bring us places with our own students we never envisioned.

Stepping Up

It began for me in June 1997, at the final observation conference of my first full school year teaching in the Montgomery County Public Schools. I had been a teacher for seven years, but I was new to the County, and not yet tenured. The assistant principal who was evaluating me had been coming unannounced and scowling to my tenth and eleventh grade English classes throughout the year. She did not mask her dismay that the English department chair had assigned me to teach the two Advanced Placement Literature classes for the next school year.

"It's a big step for you," the assistant principal said. Somehow I had the sense that she did not support my membership in an elitist club. I was 36 years old, and had a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in the teaching of English. The next year would mark my eighth year as a high school English teacher; I'd already registered to take a week-long College Board workshop to train for the task. I had no doubts about my readiness to take "the big step."

But what is "the big step"? What makes teaching Advanced Placement Literature a bigger step than teaching any other level of secondary English? Does the exam and its attendant three to six college credits privilege AP English classes over other courses in the department? Does the college veneer on a high school class make it more challenging or elitist? I've never taught ninth grade. I would consider teaching ninth grade a far bigger step than teaching AP Lit, which is still the 12th grade English teaching I had been engaged in for several years. Ninth graders would take some getting used to. When my department chair offered me the AP Lit classes, she said that she didn't want to see "my fine education go to waste." Was my Ivy League degree "going to waste" because I

wasn't teaching AP? Was there something observable in my teaching of non-AP students that made me appear to be "AP material"? Pre-open enrollment, this was a time when we freely discussed students as being or not being “AP material.” Students who read widely, wrote well, and excelled as good students with top grades and high standardized test scores were marked AP material in any subject area. What were my markings? Degrees from Michigan and Brown? My work ethic? My success with honors students? My connection with students of all levels? Was I truly more suited to teach AP than my colleagues who had been at the school longer, or had more years of teaching experience? The assistant principal didn't think so; the department chair did.

Stepping in the Right Direction

What did I think? I had no doubt that I was "AP material"; I had been an enthusiastic and passionate English student myself and had been successful in transferring that enthusiasm and passion to my work as an English teacher, no matter what my students’ placement level. I viewed my own AP placement as a "step in the right direction," a step on a familiar path I rather enjoyed, rather than as a "step up.” I would be among students who were more like the kind of student I was: engaged, conscientious, literary. I looked forward to the books I would teach, the poetry we could consider, the level of discussions and writing we could engage in, the autonomy I would have. I eagerly anticipated smaller classes, and the liberation from the minutiae that comes with many non-AP classes: disciplinary issues, attendance concerns, motivational challenges.

There was an aspect of my earliest AP teaching that reminded me of my waitressing days. I worked as a waitress several times during high school and college, and though I didn't mind taking orders and serving food, I did mind the ancillary tasks:

refilling ketchup bottles and salt shakers, restocking napkins and silverware, cleaning the coffee machines. Sidework. Busy work. When I began teaching AP, it was waitressing minus the sidework: greeting cheerful students, giving my own rendition of the day's specials, answering their many questions about the menu, making sure they left content and well-fed. And an added bonus: AP students tended to leave big tips in the form of interest, curiosity, and laughter at my jokes. There were few if any ketchup bottles to refill.

Teaching the Student Teacher

Fast forward to January 2003; I am supervising my first student teacher, Mr. K. Though he came with instructions from his professors to gradually assume my five classes of senior English during his eight-week placement, I thought it would be more beneficial if he established himself as the teacher from his very first day, which was also the first day of second semester. He stumbled a bit for a few days, but exuded an enthusiasm, warmth, and sense of humor to which three of the five classes responded well; they even found his self-deprecation and nervousness a welcome change from my more commanding, older presence. The students, after an initial testing period, settled into his routines and accepted him as their teacher. The other two classes presented more of a challenge; the students of AP Lit made it clear that they were not going to be taught by a student who hadn't even graduated from college yet. They felt that their class time was precious, as we were in a second semester countdown to test day, and I was uneasy with my agreement. Every day Mr. K fumbled marked one fewer opportunity to prepare for the exam.

Mia voiced her concern after class that Cornell would only accept a score of 5 on the exam; how could a student teacher possibly help her to receive the highest score? My reassurances that Mr. K was doing a fine job failed to persuade, and my corrective interjections during his lessons didn't help Mr. K or my students. I got a phone call from the student's mother the next day.

While on the phone, I assured the mother that Mr. K was under my supervision but would teach occasionally; I would be teaching AP Lit most days until the end of the school year. I became my assistant principal of June 1997, and my intrusive cooperating teacher of 1989 who had no trouble letting go of her ninth grade class, but couldn't seem to keep from interrupting me when I was with her seniors. AP Lit was a big step for Mr. K, a step for which neither he nor I was prepared. The students openly challenged him, defied him, rolled their eyes and talked out of turn. The students, too, sensed his hesitancy, his doubts, his lack of training in the teaching of AP, and his lack of experience as a teacher. I interrupted him while he was teaching, calling on students when it was clear he wasn't noticing hands in the air, and wasn't generating productive discussions.

When I pulled Mr. K from the AP classes, I told him that he would guest teach a few lessons throughout his placement. I knew he was disappointed. The lessons I chose for him to teach were objective and in my mind more straightforward and teacher-centered: MLA formatting of research papers, proper quotation integration, evaluating source materials. Gradually the students did build a strong relationship with him, but he was more my graduate assistant than their teacher. For example, he and I sat at different tables in the school media center and consulted with individual students as they worked

on research papers. As Mr. K's relationships with the students became stronger, more focused and assured, we began to trust him. He brought in samples of his own academic work to share with the AP students. I started to wonder what might have happened if I had left him alone to find his footing in AP. I found out later that it was indeed the policy, not just the recommendation of his teacher education program, that student teachers do not teach AP courses. I must admit that I still tend to agree—the stakes are too high; the scores are published under my name; there's not enough time for student teaching and learning in the AP classroom.

I have no doubt that with several years of teaching experience and College Board training, Mr. K will be a fine and trusted teacher of AP English. Why? Because Mr. K loves kids and literature and views teaching as a life-long career. His love and deep knowledge of Shakespeare alone will give him a strong and inspiring start. I also found Mr. K to have a healthy degree of skepticism toward bureaucracies and standardized tests; one day Mr. K will be ready to take the big step.

Taking the AP Challenge

The three teachers in my initial exploration of the phenomenon, Mr. C, Ms. M, and I, took the big step at different times in our careers. Ms. M and I were in the proverbial right place at the right time—I was in a school with high staff turnover and the department chair didn't want to teach the course; Ms. M was in a school with exponential growth and a newly opened AP policy and was deemed the most qualified despite her youth. Mr. C. had to forge a new trail and cut through skeins of bureaucratic red tape to teach AP. The lengths that he went to attest to the high values some teachers place on teaching AP.

Mr. C had already been a teacher for fifteen years before teaching AP. Although widely respected and well-credentialed with a master's in English, Mr. C's department chair was the firmly entrenched AP Lit teacher; he knew he would not get the opportunity to teach the course unless he brought a new College Board program to Montgomery County: Advanced Placement Language.

The AP Language course emphasizes the study of rhetorical analysis over literary analysis, and the students study more nonfiction than fiction and poetry. Mr. C, however, does include several poems, novels and short stories in his syllabus. The Lit and Language final exams are similar in format, and the students can earn the same number of college credits with a passing score. Although Mr. C was content to teach high school English, he saw AP as a step he needed to take at that particular time in his career, his fifteenth year of teaching:

> I wanted a challenge. I wanted to stretch myself as a teacher. I knew I would stay in teaching for a long time. I wanted to have the opportunity for intellectual stimulation and interaction I'd get teaching a course like that.

The challenge, the stretch, and the intellectual stimulation gave rise to Mr. C's understanding of the big step. As he envisioned a long career in the classroom, he knew that AP would help him through the many years ahead. I, too, welcomed AP into my schedule for similar reasons. In truth, AP Lit saved my career, keeping me in teaching long after I felt I couldn't possibly endure one more round of progress reports, loss of credit notices, or parent conferences. Van Manen writes of “pedagogical influence” (1991, p. 15) and expands the common notion that students are dependent on their teachers as children are dependent on adults. “In a deeper sense,” van Manen writes, “adults are dependent on children. Children show us what we are able to make of

ourselves and of this shared world" (p. 15). Advanced Placement English has a powerful influence in our lives. Influence, in the van Manen sense "connotes the openness of a human being to the presence of another" (p. 16). Becoming present with AP students through the work we had to do together—the work of teaching, learning and testing—led to a teaching career that was more sustainable over the long term. I didn't have the same challenge and stretch experience that Mr. C. talked about; it was easier for me to engage with more complex literature with attentive students, than it was to teach large classes of non-AP students who weren't interested in English or in school. The intellectual aspect of teaching AP, however, was essential.

Ms. M was a young third year teacher when she began teaching AP Lit, and didn't feel her commitment to being a classroom teacher waning before taking on AP. Her feelings about teaching the course center around course content and more intellectual matters: "I like talking about the books and analyzing them, and having an intelligent conversation with almost adult minds about something that I love." Although Ms. M wasn't looking for the challenge and the stretch that Mr. C was, teaching AP has brought her to a level of frustration of perhaps having too much too soon: "I feel I've reached all of my goals at 27. I teach every class I've ever wanted to teach. I have some wonderful students. Can I really do this for 28 more years?" Mr. C, currently at year 24 in his career, would give her a resounding yes; I tell her to put in her application for her doctoral studies. But those are pat responses to a complex situation: Ms. M is a beloved, accomplished, and dedicated young teacher who cannot envision her career choice as a lifetime commitment. Why not? Perhaps it is difficult for young adults to entertain the notion of doing anything for a lifetime, but in many professions—medicine and law—the

expectation is often a lifetime of practice. Why not in teaching? Ms. M's question reaches to the heart of what may be disheartening in the teaching profession, increasing class sizes exacerbated by an emphasis on standardized test scores.

Being Practical: The Writer-Scholar as Teacher

Mr. C and Ms. M received secondary teaching certification as part of their undergraduate education, and although Mr. C did teach high school for three years first, all of us found our way to master's programs in an aspect of English. Mr. C and Ms. M both intended to earn PhDs and become university professors but changed their minds early in their academic careers. I had always assumed I would be a writer, and although I majored in English as an undergraduate, I did not earn a teaching credential until returning to graduate school after several years in the work force. What makes the experience of teaching AP English satisfying to those who once saw themselves as aspiring professors, literary theorists and writers?

Choosing Plan B

Ms. M decided on her career path early in life: "I always knew I was going to be a teacher, since I was very very little. In high school I decided I'd be a high school English teacher." But studying English in college began to change her mind:

> I switched to wanting to teach college. I got my teacher's certificate thinking I could teach high school if college teaching didn't work out. I was all set when I went for my master's to go on for my PhD but I stopped because of a boy. I'm very glad that I'm here now because I'd never have gotten a job. I'm being practical and I'm happy. I don't think being a college professor would make me any happier.

Ms. M, whose childhood dream of becoming a teacher morphed into a more mature realization that she was destined for the academy, settled on Plan B, the plan she made if "college teaching didn't work out." Her AP teaching only bolsters Ms. M's

satisfaction with her decision. In both her preparation and her classroom instruction, Ms. M makes comparisons to her "road not taken," that of university professor:

> Last night I turned off the television to read an hour of criticism for today's AP class. I took the essay from *Madwoman in the Attic* and pulled out questions and ideas related to *Wuthering Heights.* There were some big big deep concepts and the students were able to bat them around pretty hard. They asked me a lot of really deep questions. It's much more seminar-like; I feel like a professor.

Ms. M, who taught college composition courses as a graduate student, experiences her current AP classes as much more richly woven, challenging, and collegiate than her college course due in part to the high caliber of many of the AP students and their ability to engage the course content. Mr. C makes a similar comparison.

Taking the Road Less Traveled

Mr. C was also PhD-bound when he enrolled in his graduate English program. A certified teacher with three years of experience, he had plans of becoming a university professor:

> When I first went to graduate school in 1982, I thought I wanted to go ahead and get a PhD. Then I found that a lot of my idealism about what graduate school was going to be like was very misguided and I found it a very political place with people who had their own agendas. I thought if I was going to be in it for the long haul, I might find myself having to make too many compromises of what I believed in. I don't consider myself a really political person and it seemed like professors had a lot of political agendas, stances and approaches to the literature. I didn't fit into that. The prospect of staying in graduate school for four or five years and not having any security about the kind of job I could get, or where I could get work, or once I landed a job, if I'd even be able to stay there and get tenure was too tenuous for me. I wanted to teach.

Mr. C experienced the politics and emphasis on publishing as obstacles to classroom teaching. As a high school teacher, he doesn't make the comparison to being a professor, and has never regretted his decision to leave the university for high school. He describes a deep appreciation for all of his students, but explains that he appreciates his AP students

in a different way: "I see them as people willing to learn and willing to listen to what I have to teach them and being open to it. They are trying to do something to get better." In Mr. C's expression of the absence of passion for the requirements he'd experienced as a graduate student, we hear the essence of passion for his chosen career:

> I'd already taught three years of high school. Teaching was always more important to me than publishing analytical papers about literature. When I was in the McKeldin Library, I would look at some of those journals and compilations of masters' theses and dissertations and it struck me: I didn't think that I was going to contribute anything else to the literature. If I truly had the passion for it, with hard work and effort I could make my way and maybe do something pretty startling. I didn't have the desire to do that. I just didn't have the desire. I could get my degree in two years. I taught freshmen composition. I enjoyed teaching freshmen composition. I took the comprehensive exams instead of writing a thesis so I could get out and start teaching again.

The real work for Mr. C, the work that ignited his passion and fueled his desire to put forth his "hard work and effort" was the job he first chose for financial security and a love of literature: high school English teaching. Both Ms. M and Mr. C made their decisions to take the road "less traveled by" (Frost, in Latham, 1979, p. 105) by not pursuing PhDs, leaving the academy with masters degrees, and going right into the high school classroom.

What neither Ms. M nor Mr. C could know when they chose their road was the possibility of college teaching that awaited them on the high school level through the Advanced Placement program. Though the speaker in Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken" laments that "he could not travel both/And be one traveler," (in Latham, 1979, p. 105), the experience of AP English teachers points to two roads that may not be as divergent as they first appear. Among Mr. C's accomplishments as a secondary teacher were not the treatises on literary theory or journal articles that were expected of him at the university, but his success in bringing a second AP English course, AP Language, to

the schools in his county, thereby opening the way for more teachers and students to experience AP English in public high school.

Teaching with Love and Passion

What we may or may not have expected as AP teachers was to fall in love—in a pedagogical sense—with our high school students, our literature, with each other, and with ourselves. When asked what she likes about teaching AP, Ms. M begins with her students:

> I like their little faces. I love working with the kids. I just like to be with them. I like to hear their perspectives on issues. I like to communicate with them about reading or writing in any way…I feel like they're my children. I get very sad when I leave them…

Mr. C, who assumes a more distant stance with his students in the classroom, nonetheless expresses close attachments to his students:

> I think it's important to tell my kids at the end of the year how much I appreciate their efforts and how much I respect them. But I'm not the kind of guy who does that on a regular basis…I feel a lot of affection for them and I'm sure they don't understand the level of affection I feel. I'm very attached to a lot of them. They're not even remotely aware of it.

Mr. C is astute in his perceptions of his students as not knowing the depth of his affection for them. Whereas Ms. M and I tend to be almost "warm and fuzzy" in an outward display of warmth and love toward our students, Mr. C is much more reserved and committed to promoting a professional persona. He describes himself as "authoritarian" and "more forbidding" than I am. His students, however, adore him and relish any personal attention they receive from him outside of the classroom, including his good-natured teasing in the hallways between classes. The members of the National Honor Society, which include many of our AP students, recently elected Mr. C to be the keynote speaker at their induction ceremony. It was through his writing that Mr. C related to the

students on a more familial level, as he delivered a speech that used his relationship with his own children as the basis for how much he has learned and continues to learn from his students.

Testing With Care

It is important to note that we have close, valued relationships with students from all aspects of our teaching, and not just our AP classes. Ms. M and Mr. C were adamant about their appreciation for their non-AP students. There is an aspect of test preparation, however, that is quite bonding in the community building sense. The test gives a concrete goal, a common project to work toward that we may not have in other English classes. The care with which we prepare students for the exam and send them into the testing center on exam day, bespeaks a level of love and affection that comes from intense work together over the course of a ten-month school year. The contradiction is obvious: how can we be loving teachers while conspiring with the often restrictive demands of the College Board? The novelist E. M. Forster addresses a similar concern in a 1927 lecture series at Trinity College, Cambridge:

> As long as learning is connected with earning, as long as certain jobs can only be reached through exams, so long must we take the examination seriously. If another ladder to employment were contrived, much so-called education would disappear, and no one be a penny the stupider. (1927/1955, p. 11)

Preparing students for tests, Forster asserts, creates "pseudo-scholars" who may excel on examinations, while failing to appreciate the "innate majesty" of novels and plays (1927/1955, pp. 10-11). Eighty years later we are in the midst of a resurgence of mandatory, standardized testing as the single indicator of a student's (and a teacher's) "success." To not prepare our students for the AP exam in our AP classes would be unconscionable in our current test-saturated climate in public education.

Throughout our teaching of AP, we balance the care with which we “train” students for the test and provide them with a college-worthy English experience in high school. The College Board will rank students on their one through five scale; we may use other often more holistic methods. As Mr. C explains:

> There are a lot of types of students who can't really show everything they know in that kind of test setting. I think it's the responsibility of the teacher to let them know that the most important thing is the work they do day to day in that course, and the impression they have made on the teacher through their good efforts and how they personally improved. I can see that sometimes and they have to gauge that in their own hearts and minds. If they stick to the course, if they do the work most of the time, everyone falls short once in a while, my judgment of them is not based on how they performed on that one test on that one day…I let them know that their performance on one test on one day is not what determines my judgment of them.

The test, however, remains our most central project. Jean-Paul Sartre explored the notion that "Human beings give meaning to things by wrapping them up in their projects" (Moran, 2000, p. 357). What meaning do we give the AP test? What meaning do we give to our course beyond the confines of the test?

The word *exam* derives from the Latin verb construction *ex amin are*, to weigh accurately (*OED Online*, 1989/2008*)*. We have no control over the contents of the exam as issued by the College Board, but as teachers we may prepare our students to understand the test as an attempt to ascertain certain strengths and abilities within the realm of early college English. Indeed, an alternate meaning of the verb *to examine* is "to try to ascertain" *(OED Online*, 1989/2008). It is this definition of *examine* that we also want our students to embrace, as an antidote to yet another alternative definition of *examine* which is "to interrogate under torture" *(OED Online*, 1989/2008). The potential for torture, duress and unhealthy discomfort for students and their teachers are rife in AP English. It is with love and affection that we dwell in our understanding of the test as yet

another meaning of *examine*, "seeing to it," and seeing our students through the rigors of AP English, rather than putting them through the wringer *(OED Online*, 1989/2008).

A Passion for Choice and Creativity

From our practical, financially-based decisions to become public school teachers, we find ourselves closer to our horizons as teachers of Advanced Placement English than we did as non-AP English teachers. Much of what we love about AP teaching and learning comes from our autonomy in and beyond the classroom. Our graduate or advanced coursework in our subject area of English, our pedagogical comfort and competence and our interest in continued authentic professional development marked us as AP-teacher material. We are trusted, established teachers who are free to choose within limits what books we teach, what methods we use, and what forms our assessments will take. Although we have a growing and diverse AP program at our school, we retain our autonomy as we are privately congratulated or benignly ignored when our students' score reports are issued. Teaching AP has been, in many aspects, the teaching of our dreams.

We share our frustrations at having too many students to teach, too many essays to grade, and too little time during the school day to tend to all that we have to do. Still, we may devote our weekends, our evenings and our summers to revising our practice, a re-seeing of what we could do better. Ms. M asserts: "I'm not perfect and I need to work harder at certain things. I could refine what I'm doing." Mr. C re-calls a new activity he devised for the AP Lang students this semester, to help sharpen and accelerate their reading of three essay questions and the construction of three thesis paragraphs in one 50-minute class period:

> I think I improve every year. I try to keep that in mind as my goal. I try to think of different ways to give students a better sense of the assignment. I liked the 'Three Questions, Three Thesis Paragraphs, One Class Period' assignment, that shows I'm not content with doing things the same way every year…What I really like about it is I'm not following a formula where I do the same thing every year.

We also share our hopes and beliefs that AP should remain untouched by the most recent trend of standardizing curricula, and aligning course content with outside directives. Ms. M recalls going to workshops where AP teachers from independent schools had maybe 12 or 13 students in a class to her 28 or 30, but she didn't envy them: "Their curricula was much more rigid. I'm glad we get to make up our own, which I think is a pleasure." Mr. C also weighs in on this issue:

> I have a very specific idea about the way I want to teach AP that works for me. I've worked hard to develop the way that I do it. I'd be devastated if somebody tried to tell me what to do on which day. That takes a lot of the creativity out of it, a lot of the individual approach. It puts the teacher in a position where they can't always act on their strengths. I think the most important thing is if you have a teacher who knows his/her subject matter, if they really like what they do, if they're passionate about it, the best thing we can do is let them do things the way they do it. The kids are going to learn from that.

The students' learning may be the bottom line for AP teachers, but not only as measured by the College Board. *Passion* surfaces as a key word for us: passion for literature, passion for writing, for pedagogy, for our students and for ourselves as teachers. The College Board's one through five scale fails to measure passion, the passion that the students bring to their study of literature, and the passion that teachers may have sparked in their students during their year in AP English.

Pedagogical Passion

The etymology of the word passion derives from the Latin *pati*, to suffer (Ayto, 1990, p. 385). Indeed, there may be suffering among those who choose, or are called, to

teach with passion. As class sizes increase, student interest and ability-levels decrease while school systems attempt to standardize not only curricula, but also teaching methods and techniques. Teachers like Mr. C and Ms. M may find themselves mired in a struggle to remain true to their pedagogy and their students. Parker Palmer writes:

> If teaching cannot be reduced to technique, I no longer need to suffer the pain of having my peculiar gift as a teacher crammed into the Procrustean bed of someone else's method and standards prescribed by it. That pain is felt throughout education today as we glorify the method *du jour*, leaving people who teach differently feeling devalued, forcing them to measure up to norms not their own. (Palmer, 1998, pp. 11-12)

A further derivation of the word passion is from the Old French *passion*, with the more modern meaning of "strength of feeling" (Ayto, 1990, p. 385). A passionate English teacher finds strength of feeling for the varied realms of the AP teaching experience.

What are the varied realms of the AP teaching experience? Where does AP teaching take us? Where does our AP teaching and learning take our students? What is it like for teachers and students to create and also dwell in this place of pedagogical and literary passion? Maxine Greene's (1986) essay, "Reflection and Passion in Teaching," calls on teachers to "stimulate imaginative thinking, the kind that summons up alternative realities for those sunken in what seems given" (p. 78), and uses as an example the relationship between the blues singer /mentor Shug Avery and the ever-evolving protagonist Celie in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*:

> [Celie's] becoming different would have been inconceivable without Shug Avery moving her to wrench away, to experience a passion for the world. Celie is brought to see that, in her case, the given is embodied in 'man.' Shug tells her: "Man corrupt everything…He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as he think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't." (Greene, 1986, p. 78)

Greene assures us that we cannot all be Shug Avery in the classroom, but urges us to "move the Celies…to resist what seems immovable, to name what seems that way as a problem or as task" (p. 79), or as test. We may, in our conscientious commitment to "student achievement" deify the College Board's final exam as a measurement not only of our students' abilities, but also as our worth as teachers of AP Lit. To dispel this notion, it becomes incumbent on the AP Lit teacher to "begin to create the kinds of spaces where dialogue can take place" (Greene, p. 73). The nature of the dialogue must be both literary and personal, even in the milieu of high-stakes, standardized exam preparation. Greene (1986) warns:

> To depend upon generalized formulas and quantitative measures, to limit our concern to student success and failure in the assimilation of curriculum materials and the mastery of skills, is (more often than not) to distance the particularities of classroom life. It is to act as if the classroom were indeed an "object-in-general," not an unstable, unpredictable human situation identical to no other in the world. (p. 80)

In this "unpredictable human situation" that is the AP Lit classroom, the connection between passion and possibility is undeniable and strong. Teachers called to teach with passion and "in good faith" (Greene, 1986, p. 72), will discover "what [students] authentically hold dear" and find out "who students think is on the 'box of grits'" (p. 80). In our shared passion for content, curriculum, and classroom community, we can tend to a variety of projects including authentic self-expression, joyous entanglement with the written word, and meaning-ful engagement with literature and with life.

Textual Passion

"The power of the passions is the power of the possibilities" (Solomon, as cited in Greene, 1986, p. 74). Through our pedagogical passion we can create "pedagogical

possibilities” (Slattery & Dees, 1998, p. 48) in the AP English classroom. Together with our students we may "step out of one world…and enter another, the textorium, the world of the text" (van Manen, 2002, p. 3). The text can be understood as our novels, our poems, and our plays of study, but also the text may be our time together and how we "read" and make meaning of our teaching and learning experiences in the AP classroom community.

My *ex post facto* response to students Molly and Julia, who wanted to know if they had time to appreciate "this stuff" called poetry and still ace the test is borrowed from Bachelard: "We must listen to poets" (1994, p. 89). And how can we listen to poets if we're more concerned with the speed with which we bubble in scantrons than with reading the poem itself? For the answers, we must also listen to the AP teachers, like Ms. M, Mr. C and me, who through our lived experiences of teaching AP strive each day in our classrooms to make ways and open spaces for our students and our colleagues to dwell in an appreciation of passion and possibilities.

My dissertation explores the phenomenological question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?** In the often disparate locales of stanzas and scantrons, where do AP English teachers situate themselves and their students? Amid the confines of a College Board exam and the demands of placing advanced students on a college level before they earn a high school diploma, where do AP teachers and students find a pedagogical home? What “great fish-net” (Hurston, 1937/1998, p. 193) of a horizon might teachers cast to widen the spaces of living, learning, and loving in the AP English classroom? The experience of finding or making open spaces and inhabiting them is the experience of being a

passionate teacher of Advanced Placement English. As a researcher, I rely on hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the homes and horizons in and beyond the AP English classroom.

Storying the Phenomenon

Van Manen writes: "The method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator…in the first place" (2003, p. 2). The deep interest that first called me to teaching was writing and reading stories, my own stories, and the stories of others. I had a particular interest in sharing my love of stories and literature with adolescents. Teenagers, as children on the cusp of adulthood, begin to compose the text of their lives while finding both literal and figurative homes beyond the realms of the familiar and familial. The high school English classroom, with its requisite poems, short stories, essays, novels, and plays, provides a complex literary, intellectual, and social playground for the life of the mind, as well as a mirror for an ever-evolving teenaged soul. To gather, read, and reflect on the texts under construction in the AP classroom, I chose the writing-centered model of "human science research…guided by pedagogical standards" (2003, p. 4) set forth by van Manen in *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*:

> The fundamental model of this approach is textual reflection on the lived experiences and practical actions of everyday life with the intent to increase one's thoughtfulness and practical resourcefulness or tact. Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the "texts" of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics. *What is novel to this text is that research and writing are seen to be closely related, and practically inseparable pedagogical activities.* (2003, p. 4, emphasis added)

As a researcher, I turn to the writing-rich phenomenological method to delve into the lived experience of teachers who have the daily responsibility of coaching and nurturing teenaged students in the high school English classroom. The "texts of life" as they are lived in the AP classroom will help me and my readers "to understand better what is most common, most taken-for-granted, and what concerns us most ordinarily and directly" (van Manen, 2003, p. 19) as teachers and as human science researchers. Drawn in particular to the community of students who have been labeled "advanced" and registered in a course that gives them "placement" in a quasi-collegiate lifeworld that technically is not yet theirs to inhabit as high school students, I rely on phenomenology to illuminate the unique experience of the teachers who, with their students, are dwelling in several seemingly disparate worlds at once.

Making Explicit/Seeking Meaning

Hermeneutic phenomenology can be viewed as a literary or artistic research methodology in its transformative qualities and its "fascination in situated life" (van Manen, 2003, p. 19). Although van Manen writes that phenomenological work has much in common with the creation of "the author, the poet, [and] the artist" (p. 19), he asserts that phenomenological research and more artistic creations "aspire to different epistemological ends, [as] phenomenology aims at *making explicit* and *seeking universal meaning* where poetry and literature remain implicit and particular" (p. 19). We may read literary texts for insight, for illumination, for broadening our horizons, for entertainment and escape; even for test preparation, but novels and other works of literature are not the results of phenomenological research. Van Manen quotes Linschoten: "Human science starts where poetry has reached its end point" (2003, p. 19).

I begin Chapter One of my phenomenological study with a poem, "A Whippoorwill in the Woods," a set of multiple choice questions, my AP Lit students, and our collective teetering in the classroom between the poetic work of the artist—the stanzas—and the corporate work of the College Board—the scantrons. I leave Chapter One where poetry "reache[s] its end point," and my phenomenological explorations begin.

Constructing the Phenomenological Text

To address the question, What is it like to teach AP English?, I turned to the phenomenon as it arose in my teaching and in my life. In this chapter, I join my lived experience in the AP classroom with the lived experience of two colleagues, Ms. M and Mr. C, launching the initial explorations into the phenomenon of teaching AP English in public high school. Informed by van Manen's "Methodical Structure of Human Science Research," my dissertation unfolds through the "dynamic interplay among six research activities" (2003, pp. 30-31):

> (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
> (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
> (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
> (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
> (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
> (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

In Chapter Two, I continue my initial investigations through my own teaching as I live it, as well as the lived experiences of two AP Lit colleagues, Ms. M and Ms. L. I visit my colleagues' classrooms to begin to read the new texts that we create in "dynamic interplay" with our students, the literary works we study, and our test preparations. I rely on the writing of the poets and novelists that we consider in AP Lit to open up the

phenomenon further. I also explore other work that exists on the teaching of Advanced Placement English, as well as use philosophic connections to bring meaning to this experience.

In Chapter Three, I provide philosophical grounding for my phenomenological orientation through the writings of Heidegger (1953/1996), Gadamer (1975/2002), Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005), and van Manen (2003). With the work of Bachelard (1994) and Casey (1993), I build a foundation for a pedagogical home in the AP classroom, while the ideas of Greene (1995) and Palmer (1993) further support the pedagogical and philosophical pillars of the passions and possibilities in the lived experience of teaching AP English in public high school.

Chapter Four moves beyond the confines of my classroom, my school, and my own experience to the lived experiences of other AP English teachers who, with their students, through lived space, lived language, and lived time (van Manen, 2003, p. 101), open up the phenomenon in ways that I can only express through the art of listening, reading, writing, and rewriting. By gathering teachers' stories through individual conversations, and reflective writing, I construct a whole text from the collected parts while naming and exploring emergent themes.

Through the more complex development of themes, Chapter Five continues to open wide the phenomenological question, **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?** As I often remind my students at the end of their essays and research reports, satisfying closure provides the reader with an answer to the question: So what? Van Manen warns us that phenomenological research "does *not* necessarily…lead to increasingly effective

management or control of human behavior" (2003, p. 21). My research will not necessarily lead to higher test scores, expanded enrollment in AP courses, or more effective teaching strategies. It is my sincere hope, however, that my final chapter brings pedagogical possibilities and a re-vision of the Advanced Placement program through the lens of the individual teachers who live what they teach day after day. The final chapter also brings a textual whole-ness, rife with passion and possibilities, that "invite[s] dialogue with those who interact with it" as "cool water invites us to drink, the sandy beach invites the child to play, and easy chair invites our tired body to sink in it…" (van Manen, p. 21). I invite the reader to a glass, a bucket, or a soft cushion, while settling into the conversation of passions and possibilities in the Advanced Placement English classroom.

CHAPTER TWO:
DWELLING IN THE TEACHING OF ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH

Making Things Present in Advanced Placement Literature

To Look at Any Thing

To look at any thing,
If you would know that thing,
You must look at it long;
To look at this green and say,
'I have seen spring in these
Woods,' will not do—you must
Be the thing you see;
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
You must enter in
To the small silences between
The leaves,
You must take your time
And touch the very peace
They issue from.
(Moffit, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 125)

In writing a phenomenological hermeneutic study of the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement (AP) English, I attempt to "enter in/ To the small silences between/ The leaves" to explore and name what I find there. In order to "be the dark snakes of stems and ferny plumes of leaves," I seek to know the thing that is the teaching of AP English by opening up the phenomenon of what it is like to teach AP English in public high school. Teachers of AP, like their students, may find themselves *advanced* to a *placement*, or pushed ahead to a future locale, where they are not-yet. AP teachers are in the unique, sometimes contradictory position of teaching a college class to high school students in a high school classroom. Together with their students, AP English teachers face the daily challenges of engaging with college-level literature and writing activities

whose valued end may be a single, three-hour high school exam in the spring. What is it like for teachers who write hall passes, assign detentions, and call parents for myriad reasons, to teach a course considered college level to students who have not-yet graduated from high school? What is it like to encourage students to love literature while keeping an eye on "the bottom line" of a single standardized test score? What is the experience of preparing students for a high-stakes exam unlike any they would encounter at the end of an English course they would take in a university?

As the speaker in Moffitt's poem states: "To look at this green and say/'I have seen spring in these/Woods,' will not do—you must/Be the thing you see;" (in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 125). To see the "spring in these woods" and to "be the thing" that I see—the tension in which AP teachers dwell between teaching and testing/high school and college—I first seek to name the "thingness" of the experience of teaching AP English in public high school. Martin Heidegger (1971/1975) guides my initial quest:

> What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing in itself? We shall not reach the thing in itself until our thinking has first reached the thing as a thing. (pp. 167-8)

And where do I begin to "reach the thing in itself" to think of "the thing as a thing"? "To the things themselves!" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 24), is the basic premise of phenomenological inquiry. As I approach the thingness of teaching Advanced Placement English, specifically Advanced Placement Literature (AP Lit), I see an aspect of teaching AP Lit as making-things-present. Although AP English teachers are oriented toward the future in the form of a year-end final examination provided by the College Board, we also seek to foster a present love of literature and a facility with language in its many forms. What is called for in the teaching of AP English is a making-things-present for students through the daily study of, and engagement with, literature and writing.

What is it like to make-things-present in an *advanced placement* course, where we are not-yet as we dwell in a high school classroom day after day during the school year, looking toward a single final exam at a future date in the spring? What things do we, and can we, make present in such a situation? By close reading and interpretation of literature, AP teachers and their students engage in what Moffitt's speaker names as looking at things "long" to know them deeply enough to "touch the very peace/They issue from" (Moffit, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 124). In our work together to read and experience challenging literature, we create a unique world in the AP Lit classroom, inhabiting a time and place to live and love literature in and beyond every school day, while working toward college credit through a qualifying score on the College Board exam.

Naming World

The AP English guidelines as established by the College Board decree that "Reading in the AP course should be both wide and deep" (2001, p. 40). It's my favorite College Board directive, making our mission more akin to crossing the River Jordan than cramming for the big test. Maybe we come closer to the Promised Land with each engaged and playful plunge we take together into a text, and perhaps this is where thingness may be revealed to us. In the AP classroom we might illuminate "thing" through particular works of literature as we engage with texts and prepare for the College Board Advanced Placement Literature and Composition Examination each spring.

Ironically, we may "touch the very peace" (Moffit, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 124) of the origin of AP thingness with our individual reading and collective study of the Vietnam War novel, *The Things They Carried,* by Tim O'Brien (1990). The novel's

first chapter titled “The Things They Carried,” invites us, bids us, “To the things themselves!” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 24). O’Brien uses the narrative technique of both structuring the first chapter and introducing us to the characters by listing what the platoon members actually carry. From “The things they carried were largely determined by necessity” (O’Brien, 1990, p. 2), to “They carried whatever presented itself” (p. 7), to “They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried” (p. 7), O’Brien creates a vivid and complex exposition to the novel. In the naming of the things that the infantrymen carry to battle in Viet Nam, O’Brien in the Heidegerrian sense “names world” (Heidegger, 1971/1975, p. 200):

> The naming call bids things to come into such an arrival. Bidding is inviting. It invites things in, so that they may bear upon men as things…The things that were named, thus called, to gather to themselves sky and earth, mortals and divinities. The four are united primally in being toward one another, a fourfold…This gathering, assembling, letting-stay is the thinging of things. The unitary fourfold of sky and earth, mortals and divinities, which is stayed in the thinging of the things, we call—the world. In naming things are called into their thinging…By thinging, things carry out world…Thinging, they gesture—gestate—world. (pp. 199-200)

In calling world, the specific world of young American soldiers in Viet Nam, O’Brien (1990) casts “the spell of memory and imagination” (p. 245). His readers experience O’Brien’s belief that “What stories can do…is make things present” (p. 180). The making things present is Heidegger’s notion of nearness and unconcealment (1971/1975, p. 198) , and the revealing of truth. Tim O’Brien has written a phenomenological novel, a novel of personal experience that makes things present in the AP Lit classroom.

Carrying The Things Themselves

I begin with my students the sometimes difficult, chilly swim into *The Things They Carried* by having them empty their pockets, backpacks, and purses onto their desks. They then write about what they carry and why. It's usually pretty mundane

stuff—a comb, a chapstick, a half-eaten roll of chewy Mentos. But my next question always proves more difficult: What do you carry that we can't see? They write about their intangibles: disappointment, shame, confidence, love, an unshakable faith in God. After writing about what they carry in their pockets and in their hearts, the students have named "not only things…[but] simultaneously name world" (Heidegger, 1971/1975, p. 200). They also find an easier, more contemporaneous entrance to O'Brien's somewhat historical novel of the 1960s. For students, the opening chapter becomes more relevant, and collapses a forty-year distance by bringing it "into a nearness" for today's teenagers (Heidegger, 1971/1975, p. 198):

> They carried their own lives. The pressures were enormous. In the heat of the early afternoon, they would remove their helmets and flak jackets, walking bare, which was dangerous but which helped ease the strain. …they carried like freight trains; they carried it on their backs and shoulders—and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry. (O'Brien, 1990, pp. 15-16)

Tim O'Brien's novel is a novel of "thinging": "By thinging, things carry out world" (Heidegger, 1971/1975, p. 200). The world that becomes present to students through an active reading of the novel *The Things They Carried*, is a world not only of recent American history, but also a world of art through literature and "the experience of tension between the text and the present" and the process of "consciously bringing it out" (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 306). This coming to consciousness is not always immediate, and may take place gradually over time.

Story-Truth and Happening-Truth

My former student John pays me a visit the day before Thanksgiving break. He graduated last year and is now a freshman at Cornell. When I ask the biochemistry major if he's taking any English classes, he gives me a wry smile, "Yeah, and you won't believe

what I have to read again." The first book is *Wuthering Heights*, and I am surprised and pleased that the perennial high school standard has found its way to college for a more sophisticated re-reading. The other novel on John's college syllabus doesn't surprise me at all. "I have to read that book of lies, again," he complains, "that book of lies I hated."

Of all the novels we read together during John's senior year of high school, I know of which "book of lies" he speaks: *The Things They Carried*. John's class was particularly galled by O'Brien's admission on page 179 of the novel:

> It's time to be blunt. I'm forty-three years old, true, and I'm a writer now, and a long time ago I walked through Quang Ngai Province as a foot soldier…Almost everything else is invented. (O'Brien, 1990, pp. 179)

The students were outraged after reading this section for homework. Why was I making them read a book of lies? What "lame" author tells his readers that he's lying? Why didn't O'Brien tell them earlier in the novel? When I remind students they knew from the start that they were reading a novel—an unabashed work of fiction—they get even more incensed because until page 179, they believed.

The author most likely would be gratified by their outrage. When Tim O'Brien lectures about his work, he addresses his readers' concerns:

> The point was not to pull a fast one, any more than Mark Twain is trying to pull a fast one in *Huckleberry Finn*. Stories make you believe, that's what dialogue is for, that's what plot is for, and character. It's there to make you believe it as you're reading it. You don't read *Huckleberry Finn* saying "This never happened, this never happened, this never happened, this never happened—. I mean you don't do that, or go to *The Godfather* and say, you know, no horse head. I mean you don't think that way; you believe. A verisimilitude and truth in that literal sense, to me, is ultimately irrelevant. What is relevant is the human heart. (O'Brien, 1999, n.p.)

What John and his classmates react to is O'Brien's particular way of making things present through his writing. After the writer's confession that "Almost everything is

invented," he further confuses readers by reflecting on what was presented as "true" in a previous chapter, "The Man I Killed":

> But it's not a game. It's a form. Right here, now, as I invent myself, I'm thinking of all I want to tell you about why this book is written as it is. For instance, I want to tell you this: twenty years ago I watched a man die on a trail near the village of My Khe, I did not kill him. But I was present, you see, and my presence was guilt enough. I remember his face, which was not a pretty face, because his jaw was in his throat, and I remember feeling the burden of responsibility and grief. I blamed myself. And rightly so, because I was present.
>
> But listen. Even that story is made up.
>
> I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth…
>
> What stories can do I guess, is make things present. (pp. 179-180)

I never had a group of students turn on Tim O'Brien and his novel as fiercely as John and his classmates. They were so absorbed in the narrative that they never recovered from the let down. What O'Brien's novel did for them was "make things present" in a sort of "laying open and letting be seen" (Safranski, 1998, p. 82) that took students somewhere they were not yet comfortable going. John is just one of several former students who reread *The Things They Carried* in college. My hope is that as college students, they will be ready to accept "the thingly reality of the work" (Heidegger, 1953/1993, p. 165) and experience O'Brien's novel as embodying the Heideggerian adage: "Art is truth setting itself to work" (p. 165).

A Story That Must Be Told

John's visit illuminated the making-things-present aspect of AP pedagogy. John, a science and math oriented student in high school, now pursuing a college degree in biochemistry, takes the time to visit his senior high school English teacher to discuss a novel he had first read over a year before. Perhaps John is only conscientious and friendly in visiting last year's English teacher; he is both, but the novel continues to live in his

head and in his heart. It is clear to me that the novel touched him as a high school senior, and continues to be part of his university present, and not only because he reread it in freshmen English. He didn't have as much to discuss about *Wuthering Heights*, but the intense level of work we did together on O'Brien's novel, *The Things They Carried*, included his and his classmates' resistance, and became The Thing He Carried, the thing he carries still. The novel became an integral part of his lived experience of AP Lit and took on additional layers of import and meaning as he encountered the novel again in college. He feels compelled to relate to me, his senior English teacher, his ongoing narrative, which becomes John's own unfinished story, in concert with the novel itself.

Max van Manen asks: "Does the phenomenological value of a great novel lie first of all, not in a critical reading, but in the living knowledge of the precritical response which is always a unique and personal response?" (1985, p. 180). I now think of John and his classmates' offense at O'Brien's narrative tricks and their protest against his so-called lies as their precritical "unique and personal response[s]" (van Manen, p. 180). John's second encounter with the novel in college, and his reaction to it, reveal that our work together in the AP Lit classroom lives well beyond the College Board exam he had taken the previous spring. John's initial reading of O'Brien's work in AP Lit gave way to his rereading at a different and even more advanced level—advanced age, advanced experience, advanced reflection, and advanced "living-through"; in essence, an *advanced placement*. Van Manen's response to his own question about the "phenomenological value of a great novel" locates a place for us to dwell between text and test in the AP Lit classroom:

> And now when I open the book again, I open the possibility of a reflective experience of my original experience. And as I try to make something of this particular experience of reading, then the metaphors, the syntactic conjunctions, the juxtaposition of words, the peculiarities of phrase and tonal qualities, the logical passages and the poetic evocations, are not pieces of disembodied language, a textual object; rather, I encounter words that I have already lived through. (1985, p. 180)

As an AP Lit teacher, I gave John an opportunity to make present and keep whole his experience of rereading *The Things They Carried*, and the other works of literature we lived together, when he got to college. *The Things They Carried* did not appear on the College Board exam the year John took it, but it did appear as an option to write about for the free-response question on the 2004 Exam:

> Critic Roland Barthes has said, "Literature is the question minus the answer." Choose a novel or play and, considering Barthes' observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers. Explain how the author's treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary. (College Board, 2004, p. 4)

I will never know whether John would have selected *The Things They Carried* over the other 32 works listed on the 2004 exam for his free-response essay; I do know that his rereading in college afforded him the opportunity to experience the novel as an encounter he had already lived through, as an opening to the text, to possibility, and to our time together in AP Lit.

Tim O'Brien's story that must-be-told—his experiences as an infantry sergeant in Vietnam, and his love affair with the exotic land, his platoon mates, and with his memories, his imagination and his writing—become John's story that must-be-told. And John's story that must-be-told is also my story that must-be-told. The phenomenon of teaching AP English in public high school is the experience of storytelling and of narrative, replete with story-truth and happening-truth. The Advanced Placement

program receives plenty of media coverage these days, including alleged happening-truth from *The Washington Post* Challenge Index, which uses a formula developed by journalist Jay Mathews to rank "a public high school's effort to challenge its students" (Mathews, 2006, p. 4). The Challenge Index is based solely on the numbers of AP or International Baccalaureate [IB] tests its seniors take, disregarding the number of students actually enrolled in the AP/IB classes on which the tests are based, or the test scores earned. But behind every percentage point, demographic breakdown, and test score is a child and a teacher with a story, a story that emerges from daily playful contact with literature, discussion and writing in public school classrooms.

John O'Donohue (1999) writes: "When we rediscover our childlike nature, we enter into a world of gentle possibility" (p. 160). The experience of teaching AP English is the experience of "worldifying" gentle possibilities for teachers and their students through the art of literature and playful interpretation. By making things present with our students we bring them to a consciousness, opening the way to experience literature by entering "the textorium, the world of the text" (van Manen, 2002, p. 3) to explore the "wide ocean of beautiful utterance" (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 478) in the Advanced Placement English classroom. The "wide ocean" is our dwelling place, where waves include not only novels and short stories, but also drama and poetry.

Dwelling in Poetry

> When the poetic appropriately comes to light, then man dwells humanly on this earth… (Heidegger, 1971/1975, p. 229)

I begin Chapter One of this phenomenological study with an anecdote and a student's question, respectively the basic building blocks of a story and an action sensitive pedagogical inquiry. When Molly asks if she should read the poem on an

Advanced Placement Literature (AP Lit) practice test before answering the multiple choice questions that follow, she is opening up her world to me. Through her initial question, “Should I read the poem first?” and her follow-up question to my affirmative response, “Are we really supposed to appreciate this stuff?”, I gain the insight that her experience of poetry is not only unlike my own—I always read the poem first—but it is neither the experience I want her to have, nor the experience I think she is having. Did I encourage her to see a poem as merely a vehicle to a certain test score? Is she perhaps the lone student in the room who would prefer to ace the test than experience poetry in all its glory and wonder? Did my teacherly obligation to the College Board strip poetry of its intrinsic art and beauty for my students?

From Molly’s questions, I gain a better sense of where she dwells as a student in the AP Lit classroom. I assume that she is not alone in her quest for the speediest, most efficient way to earn a top exam score. Although I question my role in her approach to poetry, and find myself in an uncomfortable relationship with the College Board and the expectations of the AP Lit exam, I also know that our time together in AP Lit is not always spent on multiple choice test practice. I assure myself that we do not always dwell in the realm of the test, and our dwelling is never static.

Building Poetic Foundations

Heidegger poses the question, “What is it to dwell?” He asks this initial question in tandem with a second: “How does building belong to dwelling?” (1971/1975, p. 145). His etymological analysis reveals that the verb *to dwell* can be traced to the “Old English and High German word for building, *buan*” (p. 146), signifying “to remain, to stay in place” (p. 146). In AP English, we advance our students to a place where they are-not-

yet: the college level. They *remain* in the high school building with their seven classes a day and their agenda books, but in their AP classes, they *dwell* in a different "building" that we construct together. What is it like to dwell in AP Lit? What is it like to dwell as an AP Lit teacher? What do we learn from our students' experience that we can apply to our own experience as teachers? What is it like to be with students who would rather read multiple choice questions than the poems on which they are based? What might our students' dwelling places reveal about our own dwelling places as teachers?

Heidegger (1971/1975) tells us, "To build is in itself already to dwell" (p. 146), and "building is really dwelling" (p. 148). What do we build in AP Lit? Certainly not buildings in the nominal sense, but building in its gerund form: "Here building, in contrast with cultivating, is a constructing. Both modes of building—building as cultivating, Latin *colere, cultura,* and building as the raising up of edifices, *aedificare*—are comprised within genuine building, that is, dwelling" (p. 147). Dwelling in the Heidgeggerian sense is "the basic character of human existence" (p. 215). One integral realm of experience that brings us to this place of "letting-dwell" (p. 215) in AP Lit is poetry.

Letting-Dwell

Our building, dwelling, and thinking in the AP Lit classroom is often poetic, leading us to another Heideggerian question, "How can human dwelling be understood as based on the poetic?" (1971/1975, p. 214). Heidegger writes, "Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain a dwelling place? Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building" (p. 215). He names the essential nature of poetry "as a letting-dwell" (p. 215). This place of poetry as "letting-dwell,"

Heidegger tells us, is received only through language and received only when one "respects language's own nature" (p. 215). The language of the poet, e.g., the language of Amy Clampitt in "A Whippoorwill in the Woods," cannot be received by students who don't read the poem, or only read the poem in decontextualized fragments while mining for responses to multiple choice questions. Not-reading is not-letting-dwell in the art of poetry. If we allow or even encourage our students to skip the poem and head right for the test questions, we are at the very least shirking the "responsibility to help open the imaginative spaces of our students" (Slattery & Dees, 1998, p. 54).

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene acknowledges the connection of the arts—including the literary arts—"to making community, to becoming wide-awake to the world" (1995, p. 4): "For me as for many others, the arts provide new perspectives on the lived world. As I view and feel them, informed encounters with works of art often lead to startling defamiliarization of the ordinary" (p. 4). In the "defamiliarization of the ordinary" we can began to see anew, and notice in a different light what we may not have noticed before. This coming-to-be and coming-to-know encourage us to "play with untapped possibilities" (Greene, p. 48), an essential activity in the AP Lit classroom that begins to come about by reading the literature together.

Not-Letting-Dwell

Sadly, neglecting to read the assigned material is not limited to in-class test preparation drills. Since becoming an English teacher of only seniors, I've had a steady stream of alumni visit my classroom over their winter and spring breaks. They share their latest developmental milestones from college and careers to roommates and romance. Though they arrive transformed from old teenagers to young adults, we continue our

conversations from where we left off when their names were still on my class rosters. They share their recent triumphs and struggles in the college classroom, from what of their high school years still serves them well (close reading practice, research paper organization), to what inhibits their growth (five paragraph essays, inflated grades), and then they confess.

At first I was surprised by how many of my students, my top students even, didn't read *Hamlet*, only read the *Spark Notes* for *As I Lay Dying*, never quite finished *Wuthering Heights* or *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I squelch several responses from "How could you?" to "You didn't fool me, I knew it all along." to "You missed so much." I used to tell my students in class that their reading of *Spark Notes* instead of the primary text was a blatant pronouncement that they didn't care about language, and if they didn't care about language, they shouldn't be in AP Lit. I knew that my pedantic words fell on deaf ears, but I said them all the same. Akin to Molly's question "Should I read the poem first?" and Julia's supportive, "That's what we learned in SAT Prep," these admissions give me further insight into the lifeworld of the students, to their lived experience as twelfth graders in AP Lit. I accept as gifts my current students' questions and my former students' confessions, bestowing precious insight into who they are and where we are together, so I may better imagine who they could be, and where we might journey together in AP Lit. It is also important to note that in my years of receiving visiting AP Lit alumni, not once did any of them mention the College Board exam—not the test-taking experiences, not their scores, and certainly not the college courses they never took, by virtue of being exempt based on a single high school exam.

When my graduates come to chat, they want to discuss the literature—the literature they are reading, the literature they had re-read, the literature they had recommended to others, and the literature they might have read had they not been so focused on answering the multiple choice questions first. Where might literature, specifically poetry, take us? Heidegger (1971/1975) writes, “Poetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling” (p. 218). My job, my responsibility as a teacher of AP Lit, is to bring Molly, Julia, and all of their classmates into the dwelling, or more specifically, to guide them to bring themselves into the dwelling, the dwelling of the class and the dwelling of the test, which or may not feel like the same place. To dwell, they must first read the poem, and they must read the poem *before* they read the questions.

Opening Doors to Poetic Dwelling

I begin the second semester of AP Lit with a poetry unit. The twelfth grade AP Lit students, many of whom took AP Language with Mr. C as juniors, studied only one poem in eleventh grade: “To His Coy Mistress,” by Andrew Marvell. Mr. C uses the poem to illustrate syllogism. This function of deductive logic is essential in the students’ acquisition of rhetorical strategies for structuring analytical essays: major premise, minor premise, and conclusion. The first two lines of the poem, “Had we but world enough, and time,/This coyness, lady, were no crime” (in Perrine & Arp, 1956/1992, p. 73), illustrates the speaker’s major premise: If we had eternity, we could take our time with love. His minor premise: We don’t have eternity. His conclusion: Therefore, let’s do it—now. From the Marvell poem, students move to consider the deductive logic of Martin Luther

King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and then, "The Declaration of Independence." The students' experience with poetry fosters an understanding of rhetorical strategies, as well as an appreciation of complex writing. Students learn not only the connection among the various forms, they also come to understand in context the concepts of syllogism and deductive reasoning. Most students will transfer these skills to their analytical writing for future academic writing, as well as for the College Board exam in AP Language in the spring. Mr. C uses a series of effective pedagogical strategies that serve the students well; their writing vastly improves as a result. But many of these same students will get to me in twelfth grade, and remind me of how much they hate poetry.

Knowing that some students find poetry frustrating, or only like poems that rhyme, I try to make the poetry unit a joyous and inclusive word party, with as many doors to walk through as possible. Despite rigid restraints of the College Board exam, I want the poetry unit to beckon students to come on in and sit a spell. I want students to read Robert Frost and Eavan Boland, and feel that they are catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. I prefer that the poetry unit says to students, "Take off your coat, grab a plate, help yourself to refreshments," rather than, "Sharpen your number-two pencils." A former colleague and fellow AP Lit teacher, in response to a new principal's no-food-in-class directive, once declared at a staff meeting: "There can be no poetry without food." Though we do have poetry readings and food toward the end of the unit, we don't begin that way. Instead, we begin our word party with an invitation, whose RSVP is a simple, one-word, fill-in-the-blank, in completion of this poem:

Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have _____ my life.
(Wright, 1990, p. 122)

I project this poem by James Wright on the overhead screen, and also give students a half sheet of paper with the poem printed on it, so they may easily play with their one word responses. This activity is not a guessing game, I remind them; they need not find the "correct" answer, the word Wright actually uses. I then ask a general question: What word do you want to put there, and why? Our discussion begins with their writing, the insertion of themselves into what could be considered a static and finished work. Here we dwell poetically with Wright, without meeting or talking to him. We commune through his words as we become part of the poem. Has the speaker in the hammock *loved, cherished, enjoyed, honored, watched, hated, abhorred, detested, messed up, slept through* his life? (Despite my instructions to fill in the blank with single words, some students will use word phrases that function as single words.) Which word did you choose? Why? What do our choices tell us about our varied interpretations of the poem? What do they tell us about our multifaceted meanings and approaches? About ourselves and each other? Most students are eager to share their responses, and we discuss them before I tell them that Wright's word is "wasted." After high-fiving the one

or two students who may have chosen the word “wasted,” we discuss what Wright’s diction does to the sound and meaning of the poem, and how one word can make all the difference.

The opening poetry activity couldn’t be further from what is expected from the students when they take the College Board AP Lit exam in the spring. At no time will they be asked to fill in a blank, to guess or *feel* a word that a poet may have used in a line. My experience during this exercise is not unlike the speaker in Wright’s poem. I, too, lie in the metaphorical hammock, eyes to the sky and the butterfly, when I could and perhaps should be doing something else: teaching terza rima or scansion, a term or skill more explicitly *useful* for the exam. Instead of skyward, my gaze should be desk-bound, score-bound, test-bound, but like the poem’s speaker I do not wish to look back on a life in the classroom wasted on test preparation. I prefer to turn my gaze to the present, to a fully lived present, as I dwell in the tension between testing and teaching, assessment and engagement. I press onward “in a field of sunlight between two pines” (Wright, 1990, p. 122), the pine of teaching and the pine of testing in “a field of sunlight,” that is the lived experience of teaching, learning, and dwelling with our students in the AP Lit classroom.

Beside the White Chickens

Leaning more toward the pine of teaching, our next activity at our word party includes the door prize that everyone wins, this one-sentence standard by William Carlos Williams:

> The Red Wheelbarrow
>
> so much depends
> upon
>
> a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.
(in Perrine & Arp, 1992, p. 16)

I have the poem written on the board behind the overhead screen, which flies up as we fly from Wright's chicken hawk to Williams' white chickens. I simply tell the students that "The Red Wheelbarrow" is a poem. Some frequent initial reactions include, "It's a stupid poem," or "It's not a poem," or the ever-popular, "I could have written that." Ah, but you didn't. I then ask my English-teacher question: What makes "The Red Wheelbarrow" a poem? Our discussion brings up line breaks, patterns, images, sounds—some of the most familiar attributes of poetry that students began learning in elementary school. With these two simple activities, students warm up to poetry. With a poem as short as one sentence and as clear as rain water, we continue to dwell, together, poetically.

I have no doubt that there are administrators, College Board officials, AP Lit teachers, and even students, who would argue that analysis of Williams' one-sentence ditty may not be the best use of class time in what is supposedly a college-level English class. Can we get any further from Donne and the metaphysical poets? Would our time not be better spent deciphering complex conceits or biblical allusions? "The Red Wheelbarrow" will not show up on the exam; why bother? If I responded to detractors that it is a sure way for all of us to dwell poetically, would I still have a job in the morning? What does it mean to "dwell poetically"? What is it like to "dwell poetically" in AP Lit, where class time and test time do not exist in the same realm?

Dwelling Poetically

Before we photocopy packets of multiple choice tests on poetry from the file drawers of AP past, we attempt to dwell first in the art of simple poetry, and then in the art of more complex poetry. When the students receive a poem, in an anthology, on a photocopied sheet, or on an overhead screen projection, without the requisite multiple choice or essay questions, we have no choice but to read the poem first. And I prefer that we read together. I like the communal experience of reading with the students, aloud. We often read "Quaker style," where a student reads a stanza as he or she feels moved to read; that way we need not coax participants, or interrupt a reading in progress to call on another reader. The students learn to share the responsibility of reading aloud, and even the most reticent students will take a turn if the stanza appears short enough, and the silence sounds long enough.

Much of the test-driven portion of the AP Lit course is solitary: timed in-class essays, out-of-class polished, analytical essays, and of course, timed multiple choice practice tests. With the preponderance of timed and scored endeavors, it's both refreshing and comforting to have informal, communal readings. I feel a bit subversive in my unorthodox approach to reading aloud often serious and complex poetry, but it gives all students an equal opportunity to shine. Students may mispronounce words, stop at the end of line enjambments, misinterpret inflections or read flawlessly, but it's acceptable in the name of participation and the spirit of class community. There's a strong sense of we're-in-this-together when we read aloud Quaker-style.

My AP colleague, Ms. M, has recently switched back to a more traditional approach to reading poetry aloud. As AP classes become more inclusive, each year we

have more students who in the past may have taken honors or on-level English 12 rather than AP Lit. Due to this shift, Ms. M feels the need to have the poetry read aloud in a way that is sure to increase understanding from the start:

> This year in particular I've been reading the poems out loud myself instead of having the kids read them. I've been trying to read them with the right inflection and tone. I know that's bad, but I'm secretly kind of giving them little hints along the way. I'm trying to model for them about not stopping at the end of the line, and just letting it flow and think about it as thoughts instead of lines to be read. I've been doing a lot of that just so they hear it said correctly.

Although Ms. M terms her reading the poems aloud as "bad," she feels compelled to give students the best and most time-efficient shot at comprehension by modeling proper inflection, tone, and fluency. Ms. M is not only an AP Lit teacher, but also an award-winning forensics coach with years of experience in polished, professional recitation. The students couldn't ask for a better reader of poetry than Ms. M. Ms. M's poetry readings supply an interpretation as well as an opportunity for students to become attuned to poetry through active listening and notetaking in the margins.

Reading the poems aloud herself, however, marks a change in pedagogy brought about by the existence of the College Board exam and the preponderance of underprepared and/or unmotivated students in the AP classes:

> I've been a little disappointed with the kids and poetry this semester, which I've never been in the past and again I don't know if it's this year, or the mix that I currently have—my kids are just not that excited as much. They're never overflowing about poetry. I feel like the apathy is particularly high this semester and I don't know why. There's a lack of wanting to try. Some kids are always going to be OK. In fact that's what frustrates me too. Those girls I was mentioning before, are always the ones who are writing on their poems and working at it. That's why I respect them so much. Other more middle of the road kids who could do it are just sort of sitting there staring at the page and know if they wait long enough, someone will tell them what it means. We just don't have enough time. That's just the way it goes.

The race to the metaphorical finish line, to the meaning of a poem the class is reading in February, so students know what it means in the speediest, most expeditious way in preparation for an exam in May, perhaps has a distancing, disassociating effect on students. Why should students grapple to make personal connections with metaphysical poetry when the teacher or an astute student will tell them what it means within the next five minutes? Akin to reading the multiple choice questions before the poem, or without first reading the poem as a whole, finding out what a poem means without the personal quest diminishes the art-ful experience for teacher and student, and sheds light on the dwelling place the test helps to construct.

Introduction to Ars Poetica

Billy Collins' poem "Introduction to Poetry" exemplifies the tension that a literature professor, a *real* college teacher in a *real* college course, finds himself in with students who demand instant meaning over gradual understanding. On the first day of the poetry unit in my AP Lit class, after "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota" and "The Red Wheelbarrow," we consider a poem by Billy Collins:

> Introduction to Poetry
>
> I ask them to take a poem
> and hold it up to the light
> like a color slide
>
> or press an ear against its hive.
>
> I say drop a mouse into a poem
> and watch him probe his way out,
>
> or walk inside the poem's room
> And feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to water-ski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.
(Collins, 2001, p. 16)

Upon first reading of this beloved and accessible poem, the students laugh with peals of recognition. Invariably a brave soul will admit, "I don't get it," and we'll laugh some more. Once at the end of class, a student who had just joined the army reserves left an illustration on my desk: the word *poem* bound to a chair; the letter "P" having its brains blown out by a machine-powered rifle. Had the artist not been the mild-mannered, highly literary Chris, I may have been concerned rather than amused, and somewhat grateful that during his course-packed day Chris found more time to devote to his poetry, and to his art.

I keep Chris' drawing close as a reminder of how students experience poetry, particularly in a course driven by a single high-stakes exam whose content is not of my making, and beyond my control. Collins' poem serves as an introduction not only to poetry, but also to our tension-packed pedagogical situation in AP Lit. We laugh at Collins' speaker's acknowledgement that there is a vast difference between what he wants his students to do when they read a poem, and what they actually do. At the very least he wants them to read and experience the poem; they essentially want to get the correct answers on the multiple choice section.

Jocularity aside, Collins' poem speaks to the frustrations experienced by many public school English teachers who are caught in the tension between teaching and testing, between what Grant Wiggins would deem an "enduring understanding" (McTighe & Wiggins, 1999, p. 277) for a life-long affinity with poetry and what Collins' poem refers to as "what it really means," perhaps for assessment purposes only. Nowhere is this divide more profound and obvious than in the AP Lit classroom—a course driven by a high stakes exam from its very inception. What is the experience of teaching poetry and other forms of literature to students who want to score well on an $86.00 standardized test? What kind of "introduction to poetry" can AP Lit teachers share with high school students who want to prove themselves worthy of three to six college credits without ever setting foot in a college classroom? Finally, where do the art of literature and the craft of teaching dwell when test scores loom on the near horizon?

Dwelling Aright in the Zone of Between

The Advanced Placement English teacher "in-dwells between two horizons—the horizon of the curriculum-as-plan as she understands it and the horizon of the curriculum-as-lived experiences with her pupils" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 161). Although the College Board does not prescribe curriculum per se, the test itself guides an AP teacher's planning, procedure, process, and focus. I want my students to do well on the exam, but at the same time, I want my students to engage with the literature for a deep understanding which is often facilitated and made lasting through personal connection. How can I engage my students with literature as heartfelt and personal as poetry, if I first do not get to know them? As Miss O in Ted Aoki's writing, "Teaching as In-dwelling Between Two Curriculum Worlds," I know that "implementing the curriculum-as-plan in this year's

lived situation calls for a fresh interpretive work constituted in the presence of very alive, new students" (p. 162). To reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable polarities of testing and teaching, of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, I have come to understand "that in-dwelling in the zone between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experiences is not so much a matter of overcoming the tensionality but more a matter of dwelling aright within it" (p. 163). This "dwelling aright" is an art in and of itself, the art of being comfortably uncomfortable in the "Zone of Between" (p. 163).

Dwelling in Art and Play

An aspect of teaching Advanced Placement English in the "Zone of Between" is an understanding of teaching AP English as the teaching of art: the art of reading, the art of writing, the art of discussing literature, and even the art of test taking. It is also the art of guiding interpretation through reading, writing and speaking. The teacher-speaker in Collins' "Introduction to Poetry" wants his students to use their senses to see, hear and feel the poem. He encourages his students to explore poetry in a playful manner, making the poetic experience their own as they "water-ski/across the surface of a poem/waving at the author's name on the shore." The speaker longs for his students to engage in Huizinga's notion of "holy play," which Gadamer defines as "*the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player"* (1975/2002, p. 104). Gadamer further explains the connection between art and play:

> But most important the being of the work of art is connected with the medial sense of play (Spiel: also, game and drama). Inasmuch as nature is without purpose and intention, just as it is without exertion, it is a constantly self-renewing play, and can therefore appear as a model for art. (p. 105)

The students, however, "tie the poem to a chair with rope/and torture a confession out of it" in an attempt to prepare efficiently for the assessment that surely awaits them.

Despite his requests and desires, the teacher-speaker in Collins' poem laments that his students are missing the *ars poetica,* the art of poetry. Teachers, too, may miss the art of poetry as they concern themselves with the students' not getting it in a timely manner, rather than with the students' not connecting or not engaging with the poem, or only engaging with the poem long enough to understand what it means for test-taking purposes only. What is the experience of teaching poetry for love, appreciation, understanding, and facility with language and form, while at the same time preparing students for the multiple choice and close-reading analytical sections of the College Board exam? Where are we in our "Zone of Between" as we straddle poem and test? Is there time and place in the AP Lit classroom to revel in *ars poetica*, the art of poetry?

Ars Poetica

A time and place to begin to revel in *ars poetica* is with Archibald MacLeish's poem, "Ars Poetica." After asking students to translate the Latin *ars poetica* to English, we read the poem together, Quaker style:

> Ars Poetica
> (The Art of Poetry)
>
> A poem should be palpable and mute
> As a globed fruit,
>
> Dumb
> As medallions to the thumb,
>
> Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
> Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—
>
> A poem should be wordless
> As the flight of birds.
>
> A poem should be motionless in time
> As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.

A poem should be equal to:
Not true.

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
But be.
(MacLeish, in Meyer, 1999, p. 1107)

An older brother to Collins' "Introduction to Poetry," MacLeish's "Ars Poetica" expresses in less playful but no less poetic language, the obligation—all those "shoulds"—the reader has to let a poem "be." When I offer this poem to students early in our poetry studies, we read the poem aloud and then I say nothing. The students sit in silent expectation waiting for the usual litany of English teacher-type questions: *Who is the speaker? What is the situation? What patterns do you notice?* In my silence, I attempt to defy hypocrisy and let this particular poem be. It's my local brand of organic pedagogy, to let the poem speak for itself, to let the students speak for the poem, to turn my back on the canned pedagogy attached to an exam-driven College Board course, and just let the poem be. I withstand the awkward quiet that sometimes follows, and if no one has anything to say, we move on to another poem. The first time I tried this approach, my carefully timed silence was interrupted by a student uttering the adolescent mantra,

"Whatever." I usually ignore "Whatever," as I did on this occasion, but what if I hadn't? Would the student have muttered, "Whatever," if I had launched immediately into "test talk," telling the students what the poem really means? Looking back, what might I have replied to my student's "Whatever"? What possible response is there to, "Whatever"?

My first thoughts drift to Doris Day: "*Que sera, sera*. Whatever will be, will be." But vocalizing that response would be as adolescent and annoying as my student's utterance, especially if I sang. What prompts the "whatever" response? In this instance, I decided, it was the teenage expression of "I don't get it." Some of my students don't understand the concept of "not mean/But be" (MacLeish, in Meyer, 1999, p. 1107). A poem as simple as "*Ars Poetica"* in the hands of students as supposedly advanced as AP Lit seniors, is still poetry, still new, still unfamiliar, and in their minds, still test fodder. Greene writes:

> When we see more and hear more, it is not only that we lurch, if only for a moment, out of the familiar and the taken-for-granted but that new avenues for choosing and for action may open in our experience; we may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, that is, we may take an initiative in the light of possibility. (1995, p. 123)

My students are still relatively inexperienced in the study of poetry and other forms of literature. "Whatever" becomes a question and a plea when illuminated by "the light of possibility": What does "Ars Poetica" have to do with me? Please help light my way into and through the dark lines of this poem. "Whatever" is a veiled request for a poetry guide.

AP Literature Teachers as Poetry Guides

Teachers may tread lightly when taking on the role of poetry guide in the AP Lit classroom; following MacLeish's dictate, we want poetry *to be.* Poetry is so often a personal experience, as Martin Heidegger (1977/1993) writes: "Poetry is the saying of the

unconcealment of being" (p. 198), but what kind of teacher would I or Ms. M be if we never guided our students in close reading and interpretation? Would we be teaching at all? Heidegger both illuminates and befuddles this conundrum:

> Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings *to* their Being *from out of* their Being. Such saying is a projecting of clearing, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the open *as.* (p. 198)

If I did not make the conscious effort with my students to let MacLeish's poem *be*, I would ask the class this question: What is the controlling literary device in "Ars Poetica"? The correct answer would be the simile, and the simile's very definition is that of a comparison relying on *like* or *as*. Heidegger (1977/1993) writes, "Of what it is that beings come into the open *as*" (p. 198), bringing teachers to the challenge of guiding students to the *open* through the language of poetry that they may not yet understand. The bringing of "beings to word and to appearance" is part of a teacher's responsibility with her students. What is it like to teach the art of poetry—*ars poetica*—to students for whom poetry is a foreign language? We must prepare for the "whatever" moments, the times when we expect an immediate grasp or glimmer of understanding, but don't see it in our students. A response of "Whatever" in what I hoped would be a meaning-ful silence illustrates Heidegger's notion that "Language is not only and not primarily an audible and written expression of what is to be communicated" (p. 198). "Whatever" is packed with inaudible possibilities as we read our students in the same manner we want them to read the literature, and our own hopes and expectations for them as beginning students of literature, and as beginning students of literature who must prepare for a one-shot, three-hour, high-stakes standardized exam in May.

Ms. M describes "panic[king] a bit" when working on a new poem with students, and feels that she has the test in mind every class period:

> Today we were doing "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" [by John Donne]. The kids only partially get it, or I see kids staring at the poem, and I've already told them there's several extended metaphors. I already told them what valediction means, about the parting. And they're just sitting there staring at the poem. I think, "Oh gosh, they're in trouble."

Ms. M's response to the students "in trouble" is to cajole them to understanding. The students know that if they wait long enough, the teacher or the stronger students will tell them what the poem means. Ms. M admits, "We just don't have enough time. That's just the way it goes." She explains that in the end the students like ["A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"], and "think it's a beautiful poem once they understand it." To get them to understanding, Ms. M guides them to understanding, or in the interest of time in preparation for the timed College Board exam, she tells them what it really means.

Text and Con-text

Perhaps teachers, too, are in danger of missing the art of poetry as they teach to the test in AP Lit. Molly's first glimpse of the poem "A Whippoorwill in the Woods" by Amy Clampitt was on a photocopied sheet which began not with the poem's title and first line, but with: "Questions 41-55. Read the poem carefully before you choose your answer" (College Board, 1994, n.p.). The 53-line poem didn't fit on one page, so mid-stanza, below numbered line 45, "the woods, for me, brought back," is a bold black arrow featuring the directive in white block letters, all capitalized: "GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE." In email etiquette (or lack thereof), all caps is the equivalent of yelling; on a standardized test, capitalization has the same effect on its readers. The initial directions, the numbered lines, the arrows, the yelling to turn the page, create a context that becomes part of the students' experience of "A Whippoorwill in the Woods" (see

Appendix A). Molly's question when receiving the poem and multiple choice questions—Do we read the poem before answering the multiple choice questions?—becomes valid and understandable as a reasonable response to a photocopied sheet that changes the poem's context from the five-year-old speaker in the woods with her dying aunt, to the cold and pressurized classroom of high stakes testing.

In AP Lit, the poem is our text and the page on which it is printed becomes our con-text. The word *text* derives from the Latin *textus*, the Gospel, but also "that which is woven" (*OED Online,* 1989/2008). A poem is indeed a weaving of words, experience, and emotion. The obsolete definition of *context* is from the Latin *contextus,* "to weave together, connect" (*OED Online,* 1989/2008) and the French, *contexte,* "the weaving together of words and sentences…literary compositions" (*OED Online,* 1989/2008). What becomes our warp and our weft in the AP Lit classroom when we distribute poems and passages disembodied from books, then fringed by instructions and test questions from the College Board? What complete and complex woven textile do we offer our students when we distribute poems in the form of old test questions? What new textiles do we weave from our literary texts in our testing con-texts?

The prefix *con* means "together; with; joint" (*American Heritage*, 1992), while the noun *con* derives from Latin *contra*, "against" (*American Heritage*, 1992). The contradictory connotations of *con* illuminate a basic tension in the phenomenon of teaching AP Lit. We are both with-text and against-text as we dwell aright in the Zone of Between, fostering a love and understanding of literature as well as test taking prowess with our students in the AP Lit classroom.

Test and Con-test

Text and con-text give way to test and con-test as we knowingly continue to introduce students to poetry and selected prose passages from fiction and drama in the form of test questions from past AP Lit exams. Despite what I have observed about the effects of con-text on students' reading experiences, I still present Eavan Boland's poem, "It's a Woman's World," on a photocopied page. The page's heading, before the poem's title, asserts the year of the test question in a bold **1998**, as well as the standard College Board test heading, announcing this as "Question 1 (Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.) 1. The following poem was written by a contemporary Irish woman, Eavan Boland. Read the poem carefully and then write an essay in which you analyze how the poem reveals the speaker's complex conception of a 'woman's world'" (College Board, 2000, p. 62). This poem fits on one page, though the two-column layout is not how the poem was originally published (Boland, 1996, pp. 171-2), and Boland would be justified if she were horrified.

At the bottom of the page, under the citation and above the copyright symbol, the black arrow commands: GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE. Of course, when I distribute the single-page document as a close reading exercise in preparation for a timed, free-response essay practice, there is no next page. The printed command becomes both a lie and an unnecessary remnant of a past test that dramatically alters a student's experience of "It's a Woman's World." As AP Lit teachers we often find ourselves in what Foster calls "this pedagogical game of finding meaning" (in Olson, 1989, p. 20) while encouraging "the habit of treasure hunting for meaning that can render the literary text 'dead on the page rather than…living in the readers'" (p. 20). As we couch literary works

in test practice terms, from “Go on to the next page,” to the College Board copyright symbol, we play the College Board game, hunting for the treasure with our students, in our con-test, or with-test, mode. We want our students to decipher meaning, and express their understanding quickly in hopes that they will receive a top score and earn college credit. At the same time, I know that “A Woman’s World” would be better met and considered outside the realm of the test, and that studying and experiencing poetry is not a contest, not a game, and we AP teachers might be wise to con-test the contest aspect of key aims of AP Lit and its attendant final exam as determined by the College Board.

Rangefinding

Truth be told, the first time I saw many of these poems were at College Board summer workshops for teachers, where the emphasis tends to be on the latest trends on the exam. We teachers consider ourselves lucky and cutting edge when our College Board consultant is a reader (grader) from the most recent exam. We learn what the readers were looking for when scoring, and we practice “rangefinding” together. We pour over actual student essay responses: What does a 2 look like, besides short? A four? An elusive nine? A nine, we are quick to learn, has length, as well as depth, and demonstrates facility with language and close reading skills that address all aspects of the essay question. We are prohibited from using fives in our rangefinding practice; deciding whether an essay is in the lower or upper score ranges is the first step to consistency and accuracy in grading, both valued ends in the world of AP testing.

The definition of *rangefinder* is “a device used for the estimation of the distance separating the observer from the object” (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Does the College Board transform teachers into estimation devices? Student essays into objects? What

happens to our caring pedagogy, and our passionate connection to literature, to students, and to learning communities when we become "rangefinders"? In military terminology, a rangerfinder is "usually attached to a weapon, to estimate the range of a target" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Maybe Chris' illustration of Collins' "Introduction to Poetry," the assassination of the letter "P" by automatic assault weapon wasn't too far "off the mark" for AP Lit. As a photographic term, a rangefinder is "an aid to focusing a camera, freq. coupled to the lens" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Perhaps the lens metaphor is more apt here, as we AP teachers look to the College Board and to experienced teachers to focus our collective lenses, to help our students think and write with a precision that will earn top scores, for both teachers and students.

Though our intentions to prepare our students might be noble, does relying on College Board benchmarks and strategies turn our rangefinding ventures from the photographic modes of shooting clear images to the militaristic modes of shooting targets, or worse? Is it here that teachers take out their own rubber hoses and torture the meaning out of the literary work through the demanding confines of the test questions? Is every step closer to a high score, a step further away from the art of poetry, the art of literature, the art of teaching? Is there an art we can cultivate and venerate in test taking? Can the art of poetry and the art of test taking coexist? Might the AP English classroom be a comfortable dwelling place, a natural nexus of art and test, of literature and the AP Lit exam?

Dwelling in the Art of Translating and Testing

Gadamer (1975/2002) writes: "The art of testing is the art of questioning" (p. 367). What happens to the art of questioning in the AP Lit classroom? If the art of

questioning is understood as “the art of questioning even further” leading to “the art of thinking” (p. 367), then what it is like for teachers to be driven by a prescribed set of multiple choice and essay questions like those coming from the College Board in the form of AP exams, while at the same time encouraging and honoring the questions of students? What is the experience of making room for student-generated questions in the AP classroom? Can the College Board test questions lead to student-generated questions that are based on the literature and on personal response, rather than only on the format, content, and the demands of the test?

Gadamer (1975/2002) writes: “Only a person who has questions can have knowledge” (p. 365), and further illustrates this point with the Socratic notion “that the important thing is the knowledge that one does not know” (p. 365). How might a course designed around a test, test preparation, and high scores, esteem what “one does not know”? If “a particular lack of knowledge leads to a particular question” (Gadamer, p. 366), then what becomes of a classroom where questions are prefabricated? What is the experience of teaching in a classroom where the most important questions are transported and reassembled like so many tract homes on newly subdivided farmland, reflective of the exurban neighborhood where I teach? Are AP teachers merely subdividing the minds of their students as they emphasize test scores over understanding and engagement, privileging corporate questions over student questions in the quest for top exam scores and early college credit?

Questioning the Quest

Gadamer’s (1975/2002) schema that questioning begets thinking begets real dialogue appears antithetical to a pedagogical stance geared toward testing. But

Gadamer's presentation of dialogue as conversation, wherein one "does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion" (p. 367), leads to the importance of classroom engagement and discussion and perhaps ultimately to the "art of testing." The art of testing is an art that is inextricably tied to text in the AP Lit classroom.

Gadamer (1975/2002) writes: "A person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said," and "what is said" (p. 370) can refer to the literary texts, the text of the tests, the classroom conversations and the teacher's direct instruction—also known as lectures. To understand and to question takes time, guidance and language. Students coming to AP Lit do not always have the language skills—vocabulary, grammar, and thought—to engage in conversations about the texts. The teacher then becomes translator: "In order to be able to express a text's meaning and subject matter, we must translate it into our own language," but whose language is "our own" (Gadamer, p. 396)? And in the test-centered classroom, whose language or voice really counts or matters when an outside agency is scoring tests that determine the awarding of college credit to students who have not yet graduated from high school? Our quest in AP Lit is multifaceted, as we seek to guide our students to understanding, love of literature, and qualifying test scores.

Love the Material; Hate the Test

David Foster, former AP reader and consultant to the Educational Testing Service [ETS], writes of the multiple choice section of the AP Lit exam: "The students' own language isn't wanted; their recognition of a preformulated response is the action required…Meaning is there for those who get the words right" (Foster, in Olson, 1989, p.

15). My AP Lit colleague, Ms. L, speaks to her frustrations with being caught in the tension of teaching, testing, and the quest for early college credit:

> I love the material, but hate the test. What is tested is valid and worthwhile, but it doesn't necessarily mimic or correlate with a college course. No one course in college determines your grade in a lit or comp class. In my experience teaching freshmen comp, it was the process of getting there that mattered most. That's what I think is artificial about the AP Lit exam. There's a time limit and kids have bad days, and we as teachers do not have control over what the kids are going to do on the test. Now that they have to take the test, how am I then going to be judged by their performance? Sometimes I worry about that with everything being tested, not just AP Lit. Am I going to be judged by my students' performance on the test? I know for a fact that some of my students, when they take the test this year, they don't care, they're only taking it because they have to. So I have no control over that. I may have taught them the material, and they may have demonstrated that material to me, that they can do it, but they won't demonstrate it to the College Board.

Ms. L's sentiments are in response to our school's recent decree requiring all students in an AP course to take the College Board exam, or risk losing the AP designation on their transcript. The recent institution of mandatory testing means an increased pressure for test preparation, increased opportunity for students not to take the test seriously, and increased revenue for the College Board. James B. Vopat quotes David Owen: "ETS is 'probably the most powerful unregulated monopoly in America,' and that, 'people who wish to advance in all walks of life have no choice but to pay its fees and take its tests…in order to pass various checkpoints in America's social hierarchy'" (Vopat, in Olson, 1989, p. 53). Students who in the past may have opted out of the test due to lack of interest, aptitude, or an overabundance of AP credits by senior year, no longer have that option. Jay Mathews' Challenge Index ranks schools on how many students in a high school take the AP/IB exams (Mathews, 2006, p. 4). The scores are not taken into consideration—yet.

This renewed emphasis on the test and the mission to include as many students as possible into as many AP courses as possible to boost a school's rating on the Challenge Index does perhaps a world of damage, but maybe also a world of good. The students have a new battle to wage, and a new rebellion is beginning to foment in class. At the same time, students who would have been excluded from the course in prior years, are gaining valuable experiences. Ms. M notices the resistance, but does not necessarily blame the test, and praises the recent inclusion policies:

> For some of the students this is the first time that they've ever really read challenging material. I have several kids that I had as on-level sophomores and I greatly respect them. They're getting C's and not doing well in their writing, but they're having their own minor little breakthroughs along the way. They love the class. They love coming there, they love being there, they like talking about literature and trying new ideas. 50% of the time they get it; 50% of the time they don't, but I still feel like it's worth it for that 50% of the time that they're getting it. I'm glad that they're there. They make welcome contributions to the course, and they're building confidence.
>
> I actually disagree with the new policy that every kid has to take the exam. I think that's very hard on a lot of kids who really did just want the challenge, and not have to pay over $80.00 for an exam that know they're going to fail, yet still want the experience to take a college-level class. I do admire that.
>
> I have several kids who are fighting taking the test. I fear that they're going to bubble random answers because they don't want to do it. Those are the same kids I see sitting there staring at the poems and it makes me angry. It's like they don't have to do it. I have some of them first period—a lot of the staring is they're just tired, or they don't want to do this. I don't know how to fix this typical senior thing.

Even though the school has mandated that every student take every AP test, Ms. L and Ms. M still explicitly state their two goals for the course: "to love literature and to pass the test," in that order. Though the AP exam is never far from their minds and their lesson plans, both Ms. L and Ms. M strive to provide students opportunities for authentic

encounters with literature while preparing them for the test. Their courses seek to avoid a "teacher pitfall" noted by Jan Guffin:

> Above all, try to avoid making the AP Literature and Composition course so serious and stressful an experience that students and teachers fail to enjoy it. Test or no test, literature is for our passions; we should exercise them in the best way we can with our students. (as cited in Olson, 1989, p. 115)

Exercising our literary passions in AP Lit is a daily way of being with our students, though it is becoming more challenging as individual schools and school systems seek to climb the ladder of the Jay Mathews' Challenge Index (2006, p. 4). Ms. M sees an increasing number of students in AP Lit in need of basic high-school level skills, rather than an accelerated college course. She notes, "They get mostly Cs and Ds on their essays, but sometimes they'll have a shining moment…The system is not going to change, and so I have to be joyful." It is through the literary arts that Ms. M continues to find joy in teaching and in preparing both prepared and underprepared students for the AP Lit exam. These endeavors are her passion, as she attends to her students' varied needs, at a time when more students come to her not yet speaking figurative language, the language of poets, and rely on her for guidance and satisfactory test scores.

Searching for the Lost Chord

Martin Heidegger (1977/1993) proclaims: "The essence of art is poetry. The essence of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth" (p. 199). What is the experience of a teacher bringing students to "the essence of art" and "the founding of truth" through poetry? What is it like to have the multiple duties of teaching poetry as art and the founding of truth, while preparing students to choose the correct or "true" answers on a College Board exam? AP teachers must become both translators and the trainers of translators in the AP Literature classroom. John O'Donohue writes "that the search for

meaning is really the search for the lost chord" (1999, p. 98), but students don't always have the knowledge and experience to recognize that anything is missing.

The college freshman, in the following poem by John Brehm, is like many of our students who may dwell more comfortably in the literal realm rather than the figurative, misreading metaphorical language:

Sea of Faith

Once when I was teaching "Dover Beach"
to a class of freshmen, a young woman
raised her hand and said, "I'm confused
about this 'Sea of Faith." "Well," I said,
"let's talk about it. We probably need
to talk a bit about figurative language.
What confused you about it?"
"I mean, is it a real sea?" she asked.
"You mean, is it a real body of water
that you could point to on a map
or visit on a vacation?"
"Yes," she said. "Is it a *real* sea?"
Oh Christ, I thought, is this where we are?
Next year I'll be teaching them the alphabet
And how to sound words out.
I'll have to teach them geography, apparently,
before we can move on to poetry.
I'll have to teach them history, too—
A few weeks on the Dark Ages might be instructive.
"Yes," I wanted to say, "it is.
It is a real sea. In fact it flows
right into the Sea of Ignorance
IN WHICH YOU ARE DROWNING.
Let me throw you a Rope of Salvation
before the Sharks of Desire gobble you up.
Let me hoist you back up onto this Ship of Fools
so that we might continue our search
for the Fountain of Youth. Here, take a drink
of this. It's fresh from the River of Forgetfulness."
But of course I didn't say any of that.
I tried to explain in such a way
As to protect her from humiliation,
Tried to explain that poets
often speak of things that don't exist.

> It was only much later that I wished
> I could have answered differently,
> only after I'd betrayed myself
> and been betrayed that I wished
> it was true, wished there really was a Sea of Faith
> that you could wade out into,
> dive under its blue and magic waters
> hold your breath, swim like a fish
> down to the bottom, and then emerge again
> able to believe in everything faithful
> and unafraid to ask even the simplest of questions,
> happy to have them simply answered.
> (Brehm, in Bly, 1999, p. 45)

Though the teacher-speaker in "Sea of Faith" expresses his frustration with a student's inability to grasp figurative language, the student-speaker asks what may be considered the quintessential question in guiding students in their understanding of poetry in particular, and figurative language in general: "Is it a *real* sea?" Though the teacher-speaker later regrets the sardonic tone of his inner musings, he comes to an appreciation of the student's naïveté as he gently explains, "that poets often speak of things that don't exist." In the "blue and magic waters" of a metaphoric sea of faith, students can experience art and truth through poetry, even in, or perhaps especially in, the AP Lit classroom. Our work together takes us through the art and magic of poetry, but also through the cold and harsh realities of poetry testing.

Our challenge is to guide and life-guard our students as they test, and sometimes flail, in the not-so-blue-and-magic waters of the very real College Board exam. In our role as AP teachers, we are translators and mediators, treading the waters between magic and percentiles. We want our students to be prepared for the exam, and to do as well as they can, but at the same time we encourage our students to enter the world of the text, and to be able to "[share] in what the text shares with us" (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 391),

no matter what their ability level. “All writing,” according to Gadamer, “is a kind of alienated speech, and its signs need to be transformed back into speech and meaning” (p. 393). The students in Collins’ poem “Introduction to Poetry” express their experience of alienation when they tie the poem to the chair and get out their rubber hoses. The young woman in Brehm’s poem is drowning in her own sea of ignorance when her professor throws her a lifeline to begin to understand metaphor and other figurative devices. The search for meaning in the AP classroom becomes not a session under the hot lights of coerced confession, but a gentle quest with the notion that “Everything in language belongs to the process of understanding” (Gadamer, p. 389). The art of teaching poetry, then, becomes the art of bringing students to understanding through interpretation: “All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words and yet is the interpreter’s own language” (p. 389). The teaching of AP English can be understood as “bridging the gulf between languages” (p. 387), the language of the student and the language of literature.

Solving the Riddle

What is the experience of “bridging the gulf between languages”? On my recent visit to an AP Lit classroom, my AP colleague Ms. L. is in the first week of the poetry unit. The poem “Metaphors” by Sylvia Plath is on the overhead projector, and students have a photocopy in their poetry packets. The poem begins: “I’m a riddle in nine syllables, /An elephant, a ponderous house, /A melon strolling on two tendrils,” (in Perrine & Arp, 1956/1992, p. 70). The students are writing in their poetry notebooks as a warm-up to the day’s main lesson. Ms. L. asks, “How does the speaker in ‘Metaphors’ create meaning?” Some students begin writing in their notebooks, others mark up the

poem, some stare at the page, reading and rereading, while others stare at the poem on the screen. Ms. L. scatters blank sheets of paper to the students who are not yet writing. "Draw," she says, "draw pictures of the lines if you're having trouble." Soon everyone is either writing or drawing.

Students who immediately began writing are raising their hands for drawing paper. One student asks, "If I draw, do I still have to write?" Ms. L. answers yes, as students make the transition from drawing to writing with relative ease; within minutes all are writing. One student asks: "What's the verb for metaphor? Can I write metaphorizing?" Ms. L suggests, "What about compare? The author compares?" The student insists, "But I want to make up a word." The student continues to write in her newly constructed language to convey her newly construed understanding of Plath's poem. Another student asks for a definition of "ponderous." Others go straight to the dictionary. The writing in notebooks continues, as students become more comfortable and fluent in the language of poetry in a single class period.

Ms. L begins class discussion with the question: "What do these images have in common?" Many hands are raised; several students blurt in rapid succession: "All have potential," "Big and round," "Something growing, growing big." Ms. L reviews using the students' language, "We've got round, potential, growing." A student finally erupts, "She's pregnant!" Another student adds a personal and familiar connection, "When I read about the melon on two tendrils, I remembered Ms. Van Lare." Ms. Van Lare was their ninth grade English teacher, whose tall and otherwise slim figure in late pregnancy indeed appeared as a melon on tendrils. Students begin to reminisce about Ms. Van Lare, who never came back from maternity leave.

Ms. L keeps the discussion on track with, “Yes, and how does the speaker feel about her pregnancy?” Again, many responses: “Excited,” “Anxious,” “I don’t think she’s happy. She’s a means, a stage, a cow in calf.” Mimi adds: “She ate of a bag of green apples. Sour apples.” “It’s a riddle to her,” Angie says, referring back to the poem’s first line. “She’s not sure what to think.” Rachel adds: “You don’t say ‘there’s no getting off’ when you’re happy and excited about something.” Ms. L then goes in with her big questions, referring back to her first question: “What’s the meaning of the poem? What’s the theme?” Monica answers, “Ambivalence. Women aren’t expected to be ambivalent about pregnancy, as long as they’re married.” Ms. L nods, and puts the Sylvia Plath poem “Mirror,” on the overhead. Students look at the screen, and one asks: “Are we reading it or analyzing it?” A question that hearkens back to Molly’s, “Should we read the poem first?”

Already the students are walking the bridge between the language they entered the classroom with and the language of poetry, and their gait is befitting. Ms. L, by handing out drawing paper, encouraging writing and then speaking, builds a sturdy, welcoming, and inclusive bridge between the language of the poets and the language of the students. Heidegger (1975) writes: “The bridge…does not just connect banks that are already there…It brings stream and bank and land into each other’s neighborhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream…Bridges lead in many ways” (p. 152). Ms. L and her students facilitated the creation of a bridge that brought teacher, students, and poetry into each other’s neighborhood with respect and preservation; none was diminished by the presence of the other. Heidegger names the bridge as “a thing of its *own* kind” (p. 154) that has the capacity to open spaces:

> The location is not already there before the bridge is. Before the bridge stands, there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them proves to be a location, and does so *because of the bridge*. Thus the bridge does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge…By this site are determined the localities and ways by which a space is provided for. (p. 154)

This "space…provided for" is the dwelling place that is the AP Lit classroom, where the seemingly disparate entities of teacher, student, and text can connect and make meaning through the language of poetry.

Form-ing Meaning

Students need to speak several languages to dwell in poetry. In addition to figurative language, they need to speak the language of form. In my training as an English teacher, and more specifically as an AP Lit teacher, I learned to guide students in the belief and practice that form can reveal or bolster meaning. It is a sophisticated, college-level concept, but simply expressed: form is our friend. In addition to their own initial responses to John Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," I would want students to speak the language of form; to identify this poem not only as a sonnet, but more specifically as a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet.

On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer

Much have I traveled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browned Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with wild surmise—

Silent, upon a peak in Darien.
(Keats, in Meyer, 1999, p. 879)

Why do students need to speak the language of form? Is it not enough for students to, as Collins writes in "Introduction to Poetry,": "drop a mouse" into this poem and "watch him probe his way out"? Perhaps, but I would want the students to watch that mouse probe his way out of line 8, only to find his way back in at line 9; the transitional divide between the octave and the sestet, the turning point of a Petrarchan sonnet, and often the point of greatest clarity for the reader. Would it be an insufficient or incomplete reading if students merely "walk inside the poem's room/and feel the walls for a light switch"? What if they never find it? What if the poem remains forever in darkness? By missing form, might the students miss the art of the poem?

Martin Heidegger poses this question: "Where and how does art occur?" (1971/1975, p. 143). To this question I add: Where and how does art occur in the AP Lit classroom? The content and form of Keats' sonnet both addresses and responds to these very questions. Safranski (1998) offers further elucidation of Heidegger's query:

> Art does not describe; it makes visible. What it raises into a work of art consolidates into a world of its own that remains transparent to the world generally, yet in such a way that the world-shaping act can be experienced as such. Thus the work at the same time represents itself as a meaning-providing force that "worldifies" (*weltet),* through which the existent becomes "more existent" (*das Seiende seiender).* (p. 298)

If students were to turn on the light switch for their own "first looking" into Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," what would they see? Might they have a similar experience to the poet who describes his first encounter with a certain work of literature, also in translation? If students did not speak the language of poetic form and figurative language, what would remain transparent? What would remain invisible if they missed the referents of historical and mythological allusions?

Keats wrote the sonnet, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” in response to reading newly discovered Elizabethan translations of Homer’s *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, after years of reading only the more contemporary eighteenth-century renditions. In student-speak, reading Chapman’s translations “rocked his world” so profoundly that he compares his reading experience to Cortez discovering the Pacific Ocean—though factually it was Balboa, not Cortez who made the first sighting. (Critics believe that Keats was well aware of this error, but chose Cortez because he needed a disyllabic word.) In order for students’ reading of the sonnet to become “more existent,” and to create a world or “worldify,” students need to tackle the difficult task of interpretation through translation under the guidance of their teacher. The AP Lit teacher as poetry guide illuminates not only the path of figurative language, but must also light the way to the comprehension of form.

Imping on Easter Wings

It is essential: AP Lit teachers need to teach poetic form. Ms. M relies on the concrete picture poem to introduce poetic form to her students. She projects George Herbert’s “Easter Wings” on the overhead along with this assignment: Write a thesis paragraph explaining how the poem’s structure, figurative language and diction create the theme. “I know we just read that ‘life is not a paragraph, but today it is,” Ms. M jokes, referring back to “since feeling is first,” the e.e. cumming’s poem with which they opened the day’s class. Ms. M directs their attention to “Easter Wings”:

Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more
Till he became

Most poor,
With thee
Oh, let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories;
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did begin;
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
Most thin.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory;
For if I imp my wing on thine
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.
(Herbert, in DiYanni, 1989, p. 114)

Ms. M divides the students into 8 groups of 3; I sit outside the group of three that formed next to me: Joe, Lilly, and Aaron. Ms. M tells the class, "It's a picture poem, you may need to look at it from several angles." Analyzing poetry becomes kinesthetic as students lift papers, twirl them around, and begin to share their thoughts aloud: "It's wings." "It's two hourglasses." "Boy, that really doesn't help me out." The students in the small group near me read the poem aloud. Aaron says, "It rhymes." Joe points to the first line, "That would be an apostrophe. You know, addressing someone who's not there." "That's a comma," Lilly corrects. "No, he means the figurative language," Aaron explains. Joe checks out his apostrophe theory with Ms. M as she checks in with his group. She confirms, "Absolutely. Did you play with the perspective of the poem yet?" Joe asks, "You mean the two hourglasses?" Ms. M guides, "Look at the title." Lilly asks, "Why does he keep saying 'the flight in me'?" "And 'afflicted,'" Lilly adds, "What's that?" The questions keep coming without responses, as Joe asks his group, "What does he mean by 'if I imp my wing on thine'? What's imp? Jesus, it's hard to understand. I

still don't see the wings very well." Lilly draws the outline of wings on a blank sheet of paper and shows Joe. She then folds the paper into wings, and makes them flap perilously close to Joe's face.

I hint, "Easter. What happens at Easter?" Joe doesn't miss a beat, "The Easter bunny comes." We laugh, and Ms. M comes over to get us back on task. "Who's the thine?" Ms. M prompts, "Look at your apostrophe." Joe lights up, his apostrophe identification is helpful to the group. He hitches his thumb under his armpit and begins to flap, "Here's the Lord's wing—I'm imping my wing. Oh, there are two wings," he adds as he flaps two arms. The bell is about to ring, and the requisite shuffle begins. Joe's group hasn't written their thesis paragraph yet, but they have their starting place for tomorrow. Ms. M. reminds them to read "Valediction: Forbidden Mourning" by John Donne for homework.

Ms. M's lesson in poetic form encouraged bridge form-ation in the AP Lit classroom. What Ms. L achieved with Sylvia Plath's figurative language, Ms. M accomplished with form and language together. By engaging students with each other, teacher and text through drawing, paper folding, seeing, close reading, and conversation, the AP Lit teachers become general contractors for bridge building, as well as lead translators. If someone walked into the classroom, they would see a poetry workshop, a close reading extravaganza, a classroom of engaged students excited about and loving complex, thought-provoking poetry of many shapes and forms. It is over three months before the College Board exam in May, but the students in Ms. M and Ms. L's classes are preparing for the big test, although it may appear otherwise. The likelihood that the students will see any of these exact poems on the exam is slim; it is uncertain that the

students would even recognize other literary works by the same authors they are currently studying, yet they are preparing for the exam by internalizing what Ms. L calls the "process of unpacking a poem." The unpacking process includes learning to speak the languages of image, metaphor, and form, and is a difficult process that the students, under the tutelage of their caring and dedicated teachers, eventually make their own.

AP Lit Teachers as Translators

At times I envision the AP English classroom as a meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations; each student seated at the table of his labeled country of most accessible understanding, headphone clad, reliant on his translator. Gadamer (1975/2002) supports the idea of each student behind the moniker of separate countries when he writes, "What is to be understood here is not a shared thought about some subject matter, but individual thought that by its very nature is a free construct and the free expression of an individual being" (p. 188). Because "what is said in poetry cannot be separated from the way it is said" (p. 188), students need to translate the language of poetry and poetic form in order to experience fully and appreciate poetry as art, and not as mere test fodder in the hands of the College Board.

The AP teachers, like Ms. L and Ms. M, can be seen as the Secretary-Generals of the United Nations—the co-directors with the headphones—not only for the words and ideas of the writers being studied, but also for the words and ideas of the students who are involved in the act of interpretation. Teaching as translating is a balancing act in which the teacher facilitates the conversation between reader and text. The balancing act is especially precarious in AP Lit, where the teachers not only tiptoe students across the

high wire of complex literature, but also across the College Board exam on complex literature.

Gadamer (1975/2002) offers this analogy: “Translation, like all interpretation, is a highlighting. A translator must understand that highlighting is part of his task. Obviously he must not leave open whatever is not clear to him He must show his colors” (p. 386). When one thinks of the color spectrum of literal highlighters students use when marking a text—the pastel yellows, blues, pinks, and oranges—one can envision the representation of students’ individual thought processes as they literally show their colors in highlighting what they find important in an initial reading. What students find important can take myriad forms: what is important in personal understanding and what is important to know for the test are not necessarily the same levels and realms of understanding. Inexperienced readers often highlight too much or too little, but through attempts at highlighting “the text can be transformed back into language” (Gadamer, p. 391), into a language that students can understand and make their own, for both their lifelong affinity with literature and language, and for the three-hour College Board exam in May.

Ms. L describes her experience of sharing the lifeworld of her AP Lit students as they study poetry:

> They don’t have the love of [poetry], so it doesn’t really matter to them. They don’t think it’s cool when this symbolizes this, and oh, what is the implication of that, and then where can we take it, and Ms. L gets so excited about it. And then they look at me like I’m a little wacky. Finally, today I had some kids saying, “Oh, I like Emily Dickinson.” And that’s the first time some of these children have actually said anything about liking anything we’ve done, so that was kind of neat. But it has taken me this long to get them.

> I think it's because they finally have put it together in their heads how to unpack a poem. They might be doing it unconsciously now, so as before it was tedious, where we said, OK, let's look at images, let's look at the title, let's follow the plan. But now I give them a prompt: How does the poet create meaning? And that's all I say, and then they come up with the poetic devices, as well as the meaning of the poem, and then do the connections and now, oh I like this because they can do it, and it doesn't seem as tedious. But they wouldn't have been able to do it before, without that process. It's just they don't like that process.

In making the texts of AP Lit their own, and internalizing the process of the analysis, students settle into a multilingual land of diplomacy in the AP Lit classroom. In our coming to understanding through language and the activity of conversation, "It is a life process in which a community of life is lived out" (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 446). As we conduct our conversations in languages we understand, "The text is made to speak through interpretation" (Gadamer, p. 397). Our "horizon of interpretation requires a fusion of horizons" (p. 397), but we do not lose ourselves in the process:

> If, by entering foreign language-worlds, we overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world, this does not mean that we leave and negate our own world. Like travelers we return home with new experiences. (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 448)

If somewhere along the journey we are able to join students' "worldview and language-view" (p. 442) in a "linguistic community" of learners (p. 443), then we're really onto something in the AP English classroom. Every session of literary analysis and language experience in AP Lit classrooms, with or without explicit test preparation, involves a way of being with our students and a heteroglossiac mosaic in the making, rife with passion and possibilities.

Pro-test and Revolution in the AP Lit Classroom

"Whoever has language 'has' the world" (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 453) and our work in the AP classroom is nothing less than opening the world to our students through

the many languages of literature. When I think about the yearly test—the College Board exams that we simultaneously dread and want our students to ace, the very exams that have brought us together in the first place—I think of how the tests present themselves as "truth." Our "encounter with something that asserts itself as truth"—the AP exam—can "enable us to define more exactly the meaning of the truth at play in understanding" (Gadamer, p. 489). A wonderful revolution is fomenting for teachers who choose to be pro-active and pro-test; to view and use the tests as "language games" and "the play of language itself," rather than as a limited measurement or rangefinding device. We could work against the test, protest the test, but we would be doing a disservice to our students. At the same time we can embrace the test, be pro-test in our classes, and seek to dwell aright in the "Zone of Between" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 163). As Ms. M asserts, "The system is not going to change, and so I choose to be joyful." If "the knower's own being comes into play" (Gadamer, p. 489) through questions, conversation, and hermeneutic understanding, then the AP English classroom, and other test-driven classrooms, can be transformed into dwelling places of discovery as truly expanded and fused horizons for teachers and their students.

In this chapter, I explore and illuminate the pedagogical dwelling places of AP Lit teachers, in-between places where we straddle high school and college; teaching and testing; the art of literature, and the art and artifice of literature tests. In Chapter Three, I continue my exploration to open the question further: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?** Grounding my study in hermeneutic phenomenology, I now turn to philosophers and

educational theorists to amplify the voices of the AP English teachers we will hear in Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER THREE:
EXPLORING PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Going There and Knowing There

Chapter Three marks the beginning of my phenomenological journey through previously unexplored territory. Before embarking on my travels, I call on seasoned sister-traveler, Janie Crawford, to lend me her guidance and expertise. Janie Crawford is the "powerful, articulate, self-reliant, and radically different" (Washington, in Hurston, 1998, p. ix) heroine of Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel that we often study together in Advanced Placement Literature (AP Lit). After a long, exhausting journey that is both geographical and emotional, Janie makes this declaration to her best friend back home: "It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there" (Hurston, 1998, p. 192).

I write in Chapter One of my "going-there," as I explore my journey to and through the AP Lit classroom, turning to the phenomenological question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing**? In Chapter Two, I continue my "going-there" with the companionship of two colleagues, through the printed texts that we study, and the new texts of lived experience that we construct in dwelling with our students and our literature in the AP Lit classroom. Despite our best efforts and focused intentions to engage our students with a college-level course in literature and writing, we are ever-mindful of the College Board's AP Lit exam in the spring, and often find ourselves teaching to a single standardized test. In keeping with Janie's pronouncement that "You got tuh go there tuh know there," I seek to know the thing that is the teaching of AP English and its attendant tensions, by

writing my way to "knowing-there" through the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Teacher-Researcher as Hermeneut

The term *hermeneutic* is derived from the Greek verb to interpret, and its rare noun form, *hermeneut*, refers to "an interpreter; *spec*. one of those employed in the early Church to interpret the service to worshippers who used a different language" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). My quest to open the phenomenon to know the thing that is the teaching of AP Lit, specifically the tension AP teachers experience as we dwell in the zone between teaching and testing, requires that I become a hermeneut, as well as a teacher-researcher. I seek to interpret the lived experiences of AP English teachers to my readers who may use a different language, a language that is not necessarily oriented to the pre-reflective, pre-conceptualized, and pre-critical notions of what it is like to teach AP English in public high school.

Hermeneutic phenomenology "offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (van Manen, 2002, p. 9). To bring "plausible insights" in-sight, to a purview that allows AP English teachers to see and be seen in new and accessible ways, I rely on hermeneutic phenomenology as a philosophical foundation and guiding framework. The term *hermeneutic* shares its root with the Greek god, Hermes, who as messenger of the gods, is often depicted as a lad in winged shoes and winged hat—a young god on the move. His father, Zeus, was especially proud of the youthful Hermes' precocious nature, bestowing upon him the position, "god of shepherds, travelers, merchants, thieves, and all others who live by their

wits" (d'Aulaire, 1962, p. 50). If Hermes were a mere high school mortal today, he certainly would be an AP student.

As I "go there" and seek to "know there" in exploring the experience of what it is like to teach AP English in public high school, I call on the god Hermes, advanced young messenger god of the traveling and the witty, to help forge my path as I make my philosophical home in hermeneutic phenomenology.

Teacher-Researcher as Phenomenologist

Van Manen (2002) writes, "The opposite of wonder is matter-of-factness" (p. 251). The dichotomy points me to the "Zone of Between" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 163), the space inhabited by AP English teachers as we tread the waters between teaching and testing, engaging and drilling, letting-the-poem-be and making-the-poem-mean, stanzas and scantrons. In writing this dissertation, I find myself in yet another "Zone of Between," as I am overcome by wonder and questions about the experience that I live—the daily experience of teaching AP English in public high school—and the experience that I write about as a doctoral student undertaking an interpretive study to fulfill the requirements of the PhD. How do I share my wonder, my questions, my reflections, and my recommendations for action without resorting to generalizations and facticity? Does every word I write somehow limit the very passions and possibilities that I wish to share and hope to expand through my work? How do I write my private way to a public audience?

The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, decreed, "We must go back to the things themselves," (as cited in Moran, 2001, p. 93). To go back to where I was, bracketing out my pre-conceived notions and re-flecting on what I find there, forms the

foundation for my phenomenological orientation. I eschew facticity and generalization in favor of intuition, interpretation, and in-sight, as I ground my study in the foundations of hermeneutic phenomenology. Akin to my students who might learn to appreciate a poetic masterwork on the photocopied page of an old College Board exam for test preparation, I can revel in the language, dwell in the art, and make meaning and personal connections by writing a dissertation for a public audience. Hermeneutic phenomenology calls me to dwell aright in the Zone of Between, as teacher and as researcher, as I share my wonder about the phenomenon of teaching AP English without resorting to matter-of-factness.

Writing is the way to the expression of my wonder, specifically, phenomenological writing. As a phenomenologist, I re-turn to my AP classroom and those of my colleagues to live the final stanza from T.S. Eliot's poem, "Little Gidding":

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. (Eliot, 1943/1971, p. 59)

To know the teaching of AP English for the first time, and to gather and share my knowing with the knowing of others, I have to be open to the phenomenon, to the thing itself. In concert with my teacher-colleagues, I go-there and write my way to knowing-there through the poeticizing and thematizing activities of a hermeneutic phenomenological study.

Exploring the Four Corners of the Lifeworld

I write in Chapter One that my way to open the phenomenological question—**What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?**—is informed by the "dynamic interplay among six

research activities" set forth in van Manen's "Methodical Structure of Human Science Research" (2003, pp. 30-31):

> (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
> (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
> (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
> (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
> (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
> (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

In Chapter One, I turn to the phenomenon that interests and commits us to the world, the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement English in public high school; in Chapter Two, I begin initial investigations into the experience of teaching as lived by colleagues Ms. M, Ms. L, and myself. I then explore the third and fourth of van Manen's six activities, "reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon" and "describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting" (2003, pp. 30-31), as I continue to do with the thematizing of my research participants' lived experiences. Keeping in mind that "the separation into six methods is somewhat artificial" (van Manen, 2003, p. 30), I launch the "dynamic interplay among six research activities" by digging deeply into the *Lebenswelt* or lifeworld—defined in van Manen by way of Husserl "as the world of lived experience" (2003, p. 182)—of Advanced Placement English teachers.

The lifeworld refers to "the world as 'already there,' 'pregiven,' the world as experienced in the 'natural, primordial attitude,' that of 'original natural life'" (van Manen, 2003, p. 182). As I enter the lifeworld of AP English teachers as a hermeneut and a teacher-researcher, I illuminate what I find there through the reflective practice of phenomenological writing. To explore and make meaning of the lifeworld of AP English

teachers, I rely on my pen and on the four "fundamental existential themes" as "guides to reflection": "*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)" (van Manen, 2003, p. 101).

Lived Space

When I explore with students the difference between the denotation and connotation of words, I use the word *home* as an example. In its denotative form, a *home* may be a structure, a house, an abode, where one hangs one's hat, or where one's key fits. The connotation of *home* may include the associative feelings of safety, warmth, and belonging; a haven or sanctuary. The connotative meaning of home may also include a rest home or nursing home, euphemisms for where family members may be sent when they are no longer capable of staying home, in their own houses. The word *home* takes on a dramatically different meaning then.

In a similar way, *lived space*, connotes different meanings to different people dependent on context, personal experience, and imagination. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1994) writes metaphorically of the house as "felicitous" (p. xxxv) and "eulogized space" (p. xxxv):

> Attached to its protective value…is also imagined value, which soon become dominant. Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. (p. xxxvi)

My classroom, as "indifferent space" on the school map, is de-noted as Room 252, a cinder block construction in what has come to be known paradoxically as the "old new wing." My *lived* experience of Room 252, informed by memory and imagination, is a more slippery concept. My students and I in-habit Room 252, and in doing so, Room 252 becomes our shared house. Room 252, despite its county-issue metal chairs with

attached desks, is a place where we can curl up with good books, good conversations, and good friends: “To curl up belongs to the phenomenology of the verb to inhabit, and only those who have learned to do so can inhabit with intensity” (Bachelard, 1994, p. xxxviii). What it is like for AP English teachers in classrooms to “inhabit with intensity”? In connection with the other essential existentials: lived body, lived time, and lived community, I explore the lived experience of spatiality, as in-formed by a myriad of complex factors related to place and geography.

The Dispars and The Compars

The AP English classroom is a geographic location—a work-place for teachers, a learning-place for students, and of course, vice versa. The AP English classroom is also many, heterogeneous places. Each text takes us to a different place. Each reading and re-reading of texts by students and teachers separately and together is a place. Every test we take or essay we write—another place. The experience of teaching AP English is the experience of a journey through a series of places; a picaresque or even epic journey through what philosopher Edward S. Casey (1993) refers to as “the ‘Dispars’—that is, a divergent and heterotopic spatiality—in contrast with the ‘Compars,’ a homogeneous and metrically determinate space” (1993, p. 275). The Dispars “is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: non-metric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities which occupy space without ‘counting’ it and [which] can ‘can only be explored by legwork’” (Casey, p. 276).

A rambling through The Dispars suggests an interpretive study, as what one finds there may not be “counted” or measured in a traditional quantitative sense, but better relayed and revealed as a series of stories, as narratives from the field, as tales from the

journey. This phenomenological study explores the teaching of AP English in public schools, but it is not necessarily about improving test scores, training more effective teachers, or insuring a higher placement on Jay Mathews' Challenge Index (2006). Smooth, linear movement up and down the Challenge Index from year to year is a prime example of the Compars. The "rhizomatic multiplicities" of which Casey writes express the varied and seeking root system of the rhizome, the main horizontal stem shooting out nonlinear lifelines deep into the earth. Our rootedness as AP English teachers takes deep and meandering directions beneath the surface, and to unfurl and unearth the experience, I must dig through the Dispars with my pen, bringing the experience to light with my words on the page.

My phenomenological journey is guided by the question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?** To identify, name, and express what it is like to teach AP English, I explore the Dispar-ate places where the experience unfolds, as it is lived beneath the surface: from the physicality of the cinder-block classroom to the lived experience of being a teacher in-place with students in an AP English classroom community. I, as phenomenological researcher, do the legwork, "the main means by which a journey is accomplished" (Casey, 1993, p. 276). My goal as traveler is neither to cover territory, nor to reach a predetermined destination by a predetermined time, but rather to seek, wander, and discover, so as to "arrive where we started /And know the place for the first time" (Eliot, 1943/1971, p. 59). To travel through familiar lands yet "know the place for the first time" demands seeing anew, reflecting, and writing from a new place, the place of hermeneutic phenomenology.

A Place-Memory

My first experience with phenomenological research was in a graduate course in interpretive methodology. After facilitating a class brainstorm, the professor assigned the class the general topic of having a really great meal. We were to write a phenomenological description of one really great meal from our perspective, keeping in mind that we were to help someone who hadn't had the experience know what it's like to have a really great meal. My first step in completing the assignment was to brainstorm a list of really great meals that I'd had. Looking back on the list now, I notice that it's not a list of food, but a list of places: Krupin's, my Mom's house, my Aunt Sallie's, a youth hostel in Menaggio, Italy, and L'Auberge Chez Francois.

For my phenomenological description, I wrote about Sunday brunch at a Jewish delicatessen, then called Krupin's, which had become something of a tradition among my group of friends. Significant to the experience were several key themes based on sensory details of smell, sight, sound, and taste; comparisons between geographic present and geographic past; the relationships among those seated around the table; and our individual and collective connections to ethnic family backgrounds (see Appendix B for the complete phenomenological account).

At the next class session, we broke into small groups to share our phenomenological descriptions, looking for commonalities, patterns, and themes. This thematizing activity is at the heart of the phenomenological process, and while listening to each group member read his/her description, themes jumped out at me: belonging, sense of community, attachment to childhood, adult identification to ethnic roots. Others' descriptions were eliciting my "phenomenological nod," (van Manen, 2003, p. 27), the

act of recognition that I know or could know this experience. Even though we were assigned to write about a meal, every description was rooted in place: a dormitory courtyard barbeque, a grandmother's house in the Deep South, Denny's, Chez Panisse. Although I hadn't been to the actual locations, or eaten the actual food, I could identify with aspects of my classmates' lived experience of having a really great meal.

After hearing my classmates read aloud their stories of having a really great meal, I pondered over their typed descriptions, literally highlighting the emerging patterns, themes, and anomalies. In the process, I became phenomenologically attuned to the world in a new way. What is it like to have a really great meal? It's not about the food. To have a really great meal is to belong, to be grown up, to have made it, to have come from somewhere, and to be called "home for dinner," all at the same time. The experience of having a really great meal is complex, yet I could begin to express the complexity of meaning to others through the art and craft of phenomenological writing.

Casey writes: "Journeys thus not only take us to places but embroil us in them" (1993, p. 276). I became embroiled in my classmates' experiences of having a really great meal. And although I emphasized place, my description and those of my classmates were not only about place, they were also about body (the glorious aroma of pickles and salamis), time (Sundays, 9:50 am; a 1960s New York City childhood), and community (adulthood friends; childhood relatives). To dig deeply with my observations, my thoughts, and my pen, to be embroiled in the experience of teaching AP Lit, I not only explore place, but also the corporeal, temporal, and communal aspects of the lived experience through the practice of phenomenological reflection and writing. Well-fed and

supplied with provisions, I continue on my quest to reveal, **What is it like to teach AP English in public high school?**

Lived Body

To do the legwork on my phenomenological journey means to pound the pavement—or the linoleum tile—of the AP Lit classroom: "The journey is made by maintaining bodily contact with the underlying earth" (Casey, 1993, p. 276). How many times have I jostled with students and staff through the cinder-blocked hallways, turned my face to the light of weekday sunrises through classroom windows, inhaled the chemical fumes of white board markers? How often have I felt the cold thud of teacher's desk to forehead as I dramatically feign impatience or frustration? My lived bodily experience of being an AP Lit teacher is not necessarily the experience of my colleagues or my students, but through description and thematic structuring, I can slide between the places of lived space and lived body to relay a more precise expression of what it is like to teach AP English in many of its corporeal complexities.

Van Manen (2003) proclaims, "We are always bodily in the world" (p. 103). What is the bodily experience of teaching AP English in the world of public high school? In Room 252, my fingers grip the sharp edges of the lectern when I'm being observed. I peer over my glasses when the same student delivers yet another excuse as to why she hasn't handed in her essay. My heart pounds when a final exam booklet is missing at the end of a testing session; my heart soars when I hear a shy student share with the class an original interpretation of a difficult poem. I rub burning eyes when I've graded one too many research papers after a long day of teaching. Do these sensations comprise the embodiment of AP English teaching? What do all of my re-collected bodily experiences

reveal about the teaching of AP English in public school? What do my bodily experiences reveal when explored thematically with the embodied experiences of the other teachers in my study?

The lived experiences of AP teachers are best understood, in part, as bodily experiences of perception. “We are our body,” Maurice Merleau-Ponty states (1962/2005, p. 239). My opening up the experience of teaching AP English as a corporeal experience is informed by Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical linkage between the body subject and perception: “Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body, just as every perception of my body is made explicitly in the language of external perception” (p. 239). As I write, in external language, of the lived bodily experience of teaching AP English, I may run the risk of fragmenting and mechanizing what might be best understood as a more holistic, organic experience.

Abram (1996) further illustrates this tension with an anecdote of looking at a bowl on his table. He can see only one side of the bowl from where he sits, but if he broke the bowl for a closer, more detailed look at its composition, he

> will have destroyed its integrity as a bowl; far from knowing it completely, [he] will simply have wrecked any possibility of coming to know it further, having traded the relation between [him]self and the bowl for a relation to a collection of fragments. (p. 51)

Rather than destroy the bowl in his attempt to know it better, Abram relies on the “further involvement” of his senses as “each spot invites [him] to peer at it more closely” (p. 52). He seeks to know the bowl as a bowl, not as bowl shards. In the end, he calls forth Merleau-Ponty’s definition of perception:

> Perception is…reciprocity, the ongoing exchange between my body and the entities that surround it. It is a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness—and often, even independent of my verbal awareness. (Abram, 1996, p. 52)

In my explorations of the lived experience of teaching AP English in public school, I seek to develop and make known the reciprocity between "my body and the entities that surround it" (Abram, 1996, p. 52). The interplay between myself-as-researcher and my conversants' "sensations and their substratum" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2005) forms an integral part of the inquiry process. The work of the phenomenologist is to make audible the silent, continuous dialogue to which Abram refers. Abram (1996) writes, "Far from restricting my access to things and to the world, the body is my very means of entering into relation with all things" (p. 47). To begin explorations of what the bodily experience of teaching AP English is like, I turn to Ms. L's work day routine.

A Bodily Experience

"It would be hard for me to wake up in the morning if I didn't teach AP," Ms. L tells me after learning that she would be teaching ninth grade instead of twelfth grade next fall, "I have to teach AP." Good news for Ms. L, though the department chair has replaced her on-level twelfth grade classes with honors ninth grade, Ms. L will continue to teach AP Lit. She will continue to have that added incentive to get out of bed in the morning.

An important aspect of Ms. L's lived corporeal experience of teaching AP Lit begins before dawn, at home, when the alarm clock sounds at 4:30 am. Ms. L travels a long distance and prefers to beat traffic to arrive at school by 6:30 am. In the early morning hours, when most of us are still asleep, Ms. L summons the passions and

possibilities of being-with her AP students and the literature she loves to propel her from bed to beltway to first period. Her bodily experience continues as she makes her way from the warmth of the school building, across the wintry parking lot, to her overheated portable classroom. When I observed Ms. L working with her students on Sylvia Plath poems, her enthusiasm for their engagement and their "getting-it" was manifested through her jumping up and down. In a portable classroom, in thick-soled clogs, the results are literally earth shaking for us all.

Ms. L's lived bodily experience of teaching AP Lit opens up a realm of what it is like to teach AP Lit. Her arousal from sleep in the predawn hours by the mere thought of seeing her AP students, or physically expressing her enthusiasm by jumping up and down in response to her students making meaning from a Plath poem, conveys passion-at-work fueled by possibilities-in-progress. She anticipates a day of being-with students that is rife with adventures into the known and unknown, inviting the full participation of her senses. What is the bodily experience of teaching AP English in public high school? In the world of teaching AP Lit, we are bodily in bed hitting the snooze alarm, beating (or not beating) beltway traffic, sweltering and bouncing in the portable classroom. But the lived bodily experience of teaching AP Lit takes on further significance when interpreted in concert with the other essential existentials, including lived time and lived community.

Lived Time

Time is precarious and precise in the Advanced Placement program. Teachers and students may teeter as they are *advanced* to a place in time where we are not-yet, namely to the college level while still in high school. In preparation for the College Board exam every spring, we carefully clock multiple-choice tests, essay writing, and passage analysis

exercises. In a sense, we are living Heidegger's (1953/1996) notion of Da-sein as "always already *ahead* of itself in its being" (p. 179):

> Da-sein is always already "beyond itself," not as a way of behaving toward beings which it is *not*, but as being toward potentiality-for-being which it itself is…More completely formulated, being-ahead-of-itself means *being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world*. (p. 179)

Our experience of lived time, or temporality, in the world of AP English goes well beyond and below the classroom clock's second hand. In our daily realm of teaching and learning in AP English class, we are ever-mindful of the exam that looms in our future, reliant on skills that have prepared us in the past, while attuned to the present that is always fleeting and often imperceptible. What is the experience of lived time like for AP English teachers, both in and beyond the classroom, and the school day?

Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005) writes, "To analyze time…is to gain access, through time, to its concrete structure" (p. 477). The concrete structure of lived time in AP English is not measured by the clock, but rather by perceptions of our daily being-with our students, our colleagues, and ourselves as teachers. Our "everydayness" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 338) or pedagogical experience is a focus of my inquiry into the temporality of teaching AP English in public school. Teacher time is different. A bell rings every forty-seven minutes during my workday. When the tone sounds, the students—who have been doing the notebook/backpack shuffle for the previous five minutes—leave my classroom, and race or plod through crowded hallways to their next class. I, too, listen for the next bell, as one class ends another begins, and my focus shifts to my next group of students, as they rush or saunter to their seats, eager or not-so eager for the start of yet another forty-seven minute class period.

I write in Chapter Two that an aspect of teaching AP English is making-things-present. The present, however, is not limited to the present moment as we commonly understand it. Gadamer (1975/2002) explains, "Time…is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted" (p. 297). We are never present in the world without being at once aware of both past and future. Time is not linear, as we often represent it, especially in the world of teaching and testing:

> I do not pass through a serious of instances of now, the images of which I preserve and which, placed end-to-end, make a line. With the arrival of every moment, its predecessor undergoes a change: but already it is sinking away below the level of presents; in order to retain it, I need to reach through a thin layer of time…Time is not a line, but a network of intentionalities. (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 484)

Our "network of intentionalities" is an aspect of teaching AP English that I strive to identify, name, and reveal through the phenomenological hermeneutic process. Time-on-task, timed practice tests, timed exams, teaching bell-to-bell, all point to aspects of time both familiar and easily measured. I seek to write of the undocumented experience of lived time in the teaching of AP English. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes, "Temporality makes the *being* of Da-Sein possible" (p. 340). To enter into the lifeworld of AP English teachers and make meaning of what I find there, I explore temporality-as-lived in the teaching of AP English.

A Timely Experience

Halfway through my teaching career, a brochure landed in my school mailbox from the Institute for Writing and Thinking at Bard College. I usually toss such mail in the recycling bin before heading back to my desk, but I was drawn to a summer workshop title: Fictions: Memory and Imagination. I had always loved stories, telling them, reading them, writing them, teaching them, and encouraging students to tell their

own. This weeklong workshop was calling my name; I registered. After driving six hours from Washington, DC to Bard College in the Hudson River Valley, I endured small talk over dinner with strangers (friends I hadn't met yet), and then began session one of our writing workshop, Fictions: Memory and Imagination.

Twelve of us sat around a conference table with an instructor who wore oversized 1970s plastic-framed glasses, and complained that the dorm-on-stilts she was assigned to was making her dizzy. She kept twirling her pinky in her ear and shaking her head. I thought, "Lord, get me out of here." With that we began our first of many timed writing exercises. I thought I would never make it past that first night, but after the initial round of writing and sharing, I was hooked for the week. Looking at my writing notebook now, I notice that within two days, I had ceased to write the date on my paper. I became so embroiled in my journey, so immersed in my memories and stories, and the memories and stories of my instructor and my workshop-mates, that what Heidegger (1953/1996) deems "public time" (p. 378) became irrelevant. By midweek, I wrote in a freewrite: "This is a class I won't leave to go to the bathroom." And I didn't. With the abundance of fresh coffee, juice, and cold water during planned breaks throughout the day and evening sessions, I can still recall the bodily experience of not leaving my chair for unscheduled bathroom trips, for fear I would miss a millisecond of the workshop.

My lived experience as a participant in the Bard Institute's Fictions: Memory and Imagination workshop, was at once the experience of time-less-ness and time-ful-ness. I wished time didn't exist, so the workshop could go on forever. I was living T.S. Eliot's lines:

> To be conscious is not to be in time
> But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,

> The moment in the arbor where the rain beat,
> The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
> Be remembered… (1943/1971, p. 16)

In a weeklong writing workshop dedicated to mining random personal memories for stories, the making-present aspect of timelessness opened wide the spaces for memory, imagination, and re-creation. That we are out-of-time or time-less when we are most attuned, yet only in-time can we remember, are fitting, paradoxical sentiments for a Fictions: Memory and Imagination workshop, and for a phenomenological study. Heidegger writes:

> Here time dates itself in one's actual mode of allowing oneself time heedfully in terms of what is actually disclosed in what is taken care of in the surrounding world and in attuned understanding, in terms of what one does "all day long." The more Dasein is absorbed in awaiting what is taken care of and, not awaiting itself, forgets itself, the more its time that it "allows" itself is *covered over* by this mode of "allowing." (1953/1996, p. 376)

In a study of the lived experience of AP English teachers, the concept of lived time becomes ripe and essential for interpretation as both internal/external and private/public phenomena. Teaching "all day long" in a public high school, hopping to with the sound of each bell, timing class sessions, essay writing, and multiple choice practice tests, point to the centrality of temporality and the importance of opening up the meaning of lived time for AP English teachers. As a teacher-researcher inquiring into the passions and possibilities that AP English teachers spark for themselves and for their students, I turn to Heidegger to guide the inclusion of temporality in my phenomenological study:

> Looking at the clock and orienting oneself toward time is essentially a now-saying. Here the now is always already understood and interpreted in its complete structural content of datability, spannedness, publicness, and worldliness. This is so "obvious" that we do not take any notice of it at all; still less do we know anything about it explicitly. (1953/1996, p. 382)

The making explicit of what-before went unnoticed is one of the primary aims of a phenomenological study. My experience as a participant in Bard's Fictions: Memory and Imagination workshop brought lifelong, life-affirming, hope-filled pedagogical changes to my teaching and my learning. What time-less or time-ful experiences do AP English teachers have "all day long"? What moments might they share that will express what it is like to teach AP English? What "obvious now-saying" escapes the notice of this teacher-researcher until explored deliberately and with intention? In my commitment to the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, I measure the length, depth, and breadth of the experience of lived time for teachers in the AP English classroom by *making public* "in such a way that [time] is encountered in each case and at each time for everyone as 'now and now and now'" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 383). As a pathway to reveal aspects of the key phenomenological question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?**, I bring forth the "multiplicity of the nows" (Heidegger, p. 383) as experienced by individual teachers and by the community of teachers I gathered for my study.

Lived Community

In my experience, to teach students is to be in-community with them. In any given school year, whether the landscape feels difficult and alien, or homey and familiar, I always feel part of a whole, ever-connected by threads or chains to some-thing/one other than, and in addition to, myself. To be a teacher is also to be in-community with other teachers, no matter how similar or divergent our experiences, backgrounds, or areas of expertise. Heidegger writes of "our being-with-one-another 'under the same sky'" (1953/1996, p. 379), and I seek to know and name the attributes of our "same sky."

"Under the same sky" connotes place, time, and a multiplicity of places and times, but the "same sky" is also the metaphorical shared umbrella that covers us together in-community, with each other and with our students.

Gadamer calls on "sensus communis, common sense, and…the humanistic ideal of eloquentia—elements already present in the classical concept of wisdom" (1975/2002, p. 19), as starting points for a defense of early humanistic principles. Van Manen identifies common sense as "the sense we have in common" (2003, p. 142), pointing to our being-together as teachers, united yet not bound, by common beliefs, feelings, and experiences. The eloquentia of which Gadamer writes is also apropos for the academic discipline of English, where we value the clear articulation of ideas, in both speech and writing. Gadamer reminds us: "Talking well (eu legein) has always had two meanings…It also means saying the right thing—i.e., the truth—and is not just the art of speaking—of saying something well" (1975/2002, p. 19). In our common purpose of *sensus communis* in the AP classroom, we may encourage students to think, write, and speak critically and eloquently, while at the same time "not nourish[ing] [them] on the true but on the probable, the verisimilar" (Gadamer, pp. 20-21). As teachers, we open spaces for our students to facilitate their finding and expressing themselves in a multiplicity of voices, and in doing so, we create community.

Community of Practice

Creating and nurturing classroom communities with our students is different from forming communities with our colleagues. As AP English teachers we share expertise in our field, passions for literature and for sharing literature with students, and creative strategies to maintain our autonomy in the face of increasing curricular standardization

from external sources. Etienne Wenger names such informal networks “communities of practice” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139). What is the nature of the experience of being-in a community of practice of AP English teachers? How does a community of practice differ from the communities we already have in-place, from grade-level teams to committee work to the classroom communities we inhabit with our students?

In communities of practice, membership is based on “passion, commitment, and identification with the groups’ expertise” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 142). Unlike a twelfth grade team or an AP committee in a single school building, an AP teacher’s participation in a community of practice would stem from self-selection rather than from administrative directive, and would cut across school and even district lines. The AP English email listserv bears characteristics of a community of practice, but its vast membership, College Board sponsorship, and email-only communication mode inhibit the focus and relationship building essential to the development of an authentic community of practice.

I forsee the possibility of a small group of AP English teachers, such as the one I gathered for this phenomenological inquiry, forming an “embryonic community” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 144) of practice, which would continue to develop and attract wider membership over time. I envision the small group as “a core of participants whose passion for the topic energizes the community and provide[s] intellectual and social leadership” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 141) throughout a school district. The special connection as AP English teachers affords knowledge and shared experiences that “allow [us] to learn from each other and build on each other’s expertise” (Wenger, 2004, p. 2). Placing “knowledge management” (Wenger, 2004, p. 1) in the hands of the daily

practitioners, the teachers who know the work best, is hardly a radical concept, but one that is rarely implemented in schools due to time constraints and more traditional models of top-down governance. In their purest form, communities of practice offer hope to encourage new ideas, retain and refine what works, and empower teachers to persevere in opening wide the spaces of passions and possibilities for teachers and students in AP English in public schools.

The Call of Central Office

How we make and experience community in and beyond our classrooms, and how it feels to make and experience community with our students and with each other, are essential existential areas of inquiry for this phenomenological study of the lived experience of teaching AP English. I recently came across a list of pros and cons that I composed several years ago after being offered a curriculum-related position in my school system's central office. The position, still connected to the teaching of English, would have taken me out of the classroom, and would have provided no contact with students and minimal contact with other teachers. Any potential of being-in a community of practice with teachers would have been obliterated. The bulk of my workday would be spent in *sensus communis* with other central office personnel. It might seem a no-brainer that I would decline the offer, but at the time the substantial increase in salary, and the hesitancy that I felt in not disappointing the person who offered me the position, made the decision wrenching. I resorted to writing a list of pros and cons to facilitate the decision-making process.

In addition to this English teacher's standard con items of not having the summer off, missing the literature of daily teaching, and leaving my colleagues, I listed students

by name—student after student after student. I listed students that I taught currently, as well as students I had taught in the past. Once I started listing students by name, I couldn't stop; I remembered names that I hadn't thought of in years. More than the summers off, more than the satisfaction of closing the gradebook at semester's end, more than my daily encounter with favorite authors, I wouldn't leave my students—past, present, or future. I could not imagine that any central office community could come close in heart, soul, and spirit to our classroom community, or to the burgeoning community of practice that I had with other teachers. After a good cry, I politely declined the promotion to the central office.

Perhaps it's a matter of personal preference, financial situation, or varying definitions of professional success, but what drives a teacher to stay in the classroom when alternatives are offered? What can be named in the experience of teaching that compels some to remain in-place for decades, while others run for the hills (or central office or law school or a real estate license) within a few short years? Parker Palmer writes:

> The deepest calling in our quest for knowledge is not to observe and analyze and alter things. Instead, it is personal participation in organic community…participation in the network of caring and accountability called truth. (1983/1993, pp. 53-54)

Is our "quest for knowledge" really a quest for "organic community"? Is it also our students' quest? Might a community of practice begin to answer our "deepest calling" as AP English teachers? How does our "deepest calling" as AP English teachers mesh with our students' deepest callings? What if our students' deepest callings were only for top scores on the College Board exam? Where is the nexus of quest and community, for

us and for our students? In part, this phenomenological inquiry will help forge the paths to authentic communities of practice, care, and calling in the AP English classroom.

Imagination and Empathy

Maxine Greene (1995) names imagination as the way that teachers and students find their way to community. She writes:

> Imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of their students, in part because teachers incapable of thinking imaginatively or of releasing students to encounter works of literature and other forms of art are probably also unable to communicate to the young what the use of imagination signifies. If it is the case that imagination feeds one's capacity to feel one's way into another's vantage point, these teachers may also be lacking empathy. (pp. 36-7)

Heidegger (1953/1996) names empathy as the way "to provide the first ontological bridge from one's own subject…to the other subject, which is initially quite inaccessible" (p. 117), but posits: "Being-with-one-another cannot be understood as a summative result of the occurrence of several 'subjects'" (p. 118). A community is not merely a gathering of people; what transforms fragments to wholeness is not readily accessible, and becomes an important focus of this phenomenological inquiry.

Determining what it is like to live-in-community as AP teachers requires a thematic approach to articulate the realms of experience in the process of becoming. Greene (1995) writes: "Democracy, we realize, means a community that is always in the making" (p. 39). In the community or communities of the lifeworlds of AP English teachers, we may also rely on Greene's alternative definition to imagination for guidance: "It is becoming a friend of someone else's mind, with the wonderful power to return to that person a sense of wholeness. Often, imagination can bring severed parts together, can integrate into the right order, can create wholes" (p. 38). As we create wholes in the lifeworld of AP English, we are mindful of

> …alternative possibilities for [our] own becoming and [our] group's becoming. Community is not a question of which social contracts are the more reasonable to enter. It is a question of what might contribute to the pursuit of shared goods: what ways of being together, of attaining mutuality, of reaching some common world. (Greene, 1995, p. 39)

What constitutes our "common world" in AP English? What aspects of our "common world" come from the College Board, and what do we share from our own identities, passions, and desires? What sense of our world do we hold in common? What *sensus communis* guides us? What is the experience of facilitating possibilities and fueling passions for us and for our students through literature, writing, speaking, and testing? What is it like to at once nurture students in the warmth of our caring pedagogy, while preparing them for a single three-hour exam? We look to our teaching as we look to transform. Palmer (1983/1993) writes, "The truest passion behind our need to know is the desire to reweave that community and take our proper place in it" (p. 54). As I seek to know and name "that community" or the multiple communities that form and flourish through the teaching of AP English in public high school, I leave behind the four existentials of the lifeworld as *separate entities,* and begin to piece together existential fragments to form a kaleidoscopic whole.

Writing My Way Home

> Writing is the method. (van Manen, 2003, p. 126)

Writing of the four existentials of the lifeworld one-by-one is somewhat forced and artificial. Casey (1993) states: "And yet the merest daily journey brings space and time together in the event place" (p. 287). Add the bodily components of the journey and a few traveling companions, and we have the four existentials occurring through spatiality, temporality, corporeality, and relationality. Examining each existential on its own is like unraveling an intricate weaving, thread-by-thread.

On a recent visit to my mother-in-law's house, Gram teaches my 13 year-old niece, Emma, how to weave on the floor loom in the corner of the family dining room. Gram begins by showing Emma both finished and partially finished work: scarves, placemats, a vest. Gram then teases out a few individual strands from an unfinished scarf to show Emma the simple origin of a dazzling, complex pattern. In a similar way, as a new phenomenologist, I teach myself and my readers how to begin to "do phenomenology" by examining its individual parts before weaving my own, yet-to-be-determined whole. "I am who I am not yet," proclaims Maxine Greene (as cited in Pinar, 1998, p. 1), and as a phenomenologist, I am the novice weaver in my mother-in-law's dining room, while Greene's words resonate. If only I could master the craft as quickly as Emma.

Finding the Original Shell

"The first task of the phenomenologist," Bachelard (1994) writes, "is to find the original shell" (p. 4). To reveal the "original shell[s]" of AP English teachers in public school, to name them as such, and to share my insights with my readers, is a multifaceted process central to "doing phenomenology." The process forms the phenomenological journey I have begun to undertake. My search for the original shell is also a search for the roots of passion. I wonder what first called English teachers to their vocation. I also wonder what keeps them there, despite overwhelming demands from external sources ranging from the College Board to the school-based administrators.

I re-call characteristics of my original shell as a book-filled home, an avid-reader mother, and the literary homes that beckoned and sheltered me through childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. I've lived in literary homes since I learned to read: the

little house on the banks of Plum Creek, Misslethwaite Manor in *The Secret Garden*, Fern's farm with Wilbur and Charlotte, and even James' peach. Later I moved through the Bronte's family compound: Thornfield Hall, Wildfell Hall, Thrushcross Grange, and Wuthering Heights. The front doors always flung open wide to welcome me, and welcome me still, and I've delighted in conducting house tours of my favorite (and not-so favorite) literary homes to hundreds of students over the years.

Homecoming

To situate myself as a teacher-researcher, and more specifically as a hermeneutic phenomenologist, I launch a maiden voyage that is both a home-coming to familiar landscapes (the public school classroom, favorite novels, pedagogical situations with students on my rosters) and a home-steading in unfamiliar, unchartered wilderness (other teachers' classrooms, novels I've never read or taught, students I don't know). This voyage is not the low-budget, three-hour tour, but rather a long, sometimes painstaking, arduous, and meaning-making journey of import:

> Being-in-place brings with it actualities and virtualities of motion that have little to do with speed and everything to do with exploration and inhabitation, with depth instead of distance, horizon rather than border, arc and not perimeter. (Casey, 1993, p. 289)

As I inhabit and explore, both my own teaching lifeworld and those of my participants, I experience a journey that embraces the inherent paradoxical nature of homecoming and homesteading. In homecoming, I return to the places that are familiar to me. My range of experiences, i.e. my phenomenological orientation, in the intervening time that has transpired since I felt at-home here, helps me see these old places a-new. I see my home-place through new perspectives, an embodiment of Eliot's (1943/1971) lines: "And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the

place for the first time" (p. 59). To know my own home for the first time, to find the original shell and share what it is like to be t/here is the task of the phenomenologist. Casey (1993) writes:

> I now know my home in the light of the larger place-world through which I have traveled. Had I remained at home and not left, I would never have come to see it in such a different and more complete light. The longest way around is the shortest way home. (p. 294)

By assuring its practitioners the "longest way around," hermeneutic phenomenology is certainly not the AAA route of philosophical foundations or research methodologies. The insight we gain, however, by having our work informed by phenomenological guidelines, reveals layers of precious sedimentation traditionally buried deep beneath the surface of place, time, and memory. The unearthing and illuminating of things previously hidden in familiar home-places allow the "'getting back/into/place'…where the journey can come to an end in space and time, enabling us to experience it on its own merits as the place that it is" (Casey, 1993, p. 297). We come home a-new, informed and enlightened by our fresh perspective.

Homesteading

As teachers, we strive to accept our students for who they are, and appreciate our teaching position as "the place that it is" (Casey, 1993, p. 297). Another leg of the journey to knowing and to accepting, is the exploration of the unfamiliar, the act of *homesteading.* When we homestead, we travel to a new, unknown territory and commit to establishing a home-place for a long-term future. Casey explains:

> If in homecoming I come back to a home that *was*, in homesteading I come to a home *to be*. In the present in which I am engaged in both experiences, I find myself in a limbo between a past and a future home. (p. 299)

My explorations of the lived experience of teaching AP English in public high school find me in “a limbo between a past and a future home” (Casey, 1993, p. 299). Although I did not know what meaning and discovery I would make as I embarked on my phenomenological journey, I knew that as I uncovered and named the tensions between teaching and testing that teachers live every day, my lifeworld as an AP teacher would look and feel familiar, yet at the same time, would never be the same again.

Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005) writes, “If we succeed in understanding the subject, it will not be in its pure form, but by seeking it at the intersection of its dimensions” (p. 477). I continue my inquiry into a deeper understanding of the lived experience of teaching AP English by seeking the intersection of its dimensions: community, together and a-part; time past, present, and future; bodily knowing and awareness; and places known, un-known, and re-known. At this point in my career I welcome the new-ness, re-newal, and the renovation that such an exploration promises. I am reminded of Ms. L’s pronouncement, “It would be hard for me to wake up in the morning if I didn’t teach AP,” and its connection to the history of my own career. I write in Chapter One about how I came to teach AP Lit after eight years of teaching high school English, and how in many ways, it was the teaching of my dreams. I also reveal in Chapter One that AP kept me a classroom teacher when I began to revise my resume, look outside of high school teaching, and wonder how I was going to make it through another school year. More than getting me out of bed in the morning, teaching AP Lit saved my teaching life. I didn’t need a career change after all, only a career renovation, and AP Lit provided the blueprints.

Home Renovation

Work, love, build a house, and die. But build a house. (Hall, 1988, p. 61)

During the course of this dissertation writing, my husband and I renovated our house in Silver Spring, Maryland. It was the home we bought early in our marriage, what our parents' generation would call a starter home. It was a two-bedroom Cape Cod, built in 1938 on a quiet dead-end street with a fenced yard and most unusual for our close-in suburban neighborhood, a one-car garage (that will never see a car). The house was smaller than the one either of us grew up in. When we went to sign the papers, we decided that we'd be on a five-year plan; we'd move up to bigger and better after five years.

Ten years passed and we were still in our starter home, though our adult lives were well underway. The Washington, DC area had been good to us: good jobs, good friends, good neighbors. With a big black Labrador retriever and a soccer ball-kicking eight-year-old son, we'd long outgrown our starter home. It seemed that just yesterday we had started, yet our tiny house groaned under the weight of its contents—we were shoehorned in. We needed more space; we could afford more space, but we were as wedded to place as we were to each other. After three years of fruitless househunting in tonier suburbs, we decided to stay-in-place and renovate.

The Holy Ghost

The obsolete theological definition of renovation is, "Renewal wrought by the Holy Ghost; the creation of a new spirit within one" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Aside from the fact that some homeowners may rely on prayers to weather the ups and downs

of home renovation, the process of home renovation is indeed rejuvenating, invigorating, regenerative, and transformative, as well as exhausting.

Our starter home became our dream home as we hired an architect, a builder, and a kitchen designer. We moved to a nearby rental house and watched, first with dismay and then with dubious wonder and wild excitement, as the construction crew took sledge hammers to the interior, pulling up floors and tearing down walls. Our beloved 65 year-old starter home was reduced to its original shell, as its finest and not-so-finest features overloaded the dumpster out front for all to see. The dumpster became a party in and of itself, as neighbors we knew and didn't know used it day and night as their personal repository and community swap meet.

As quickly as the house interior was demolished, the exterior was reborn. Off came the roof. My beloved attic office that ran the length of the house—where my husband never failed to hit his head on the sloped ceiling and curse as he climbed the too steep, not up-to-code stairs, where my son fought epic battles at my feet with Playmobil Vikings and pirates—was gone and open to the elements. In what seemed an instant, a full second story was framed, roofed, clad in Tyvek, and finished in eco-friendly fiber board siding. We had a new house.

On the final walkthrough amidst cherry wood cabinets and granite countertops, I confessed to the architect that as much as I loved the new house, I missed our old one. I longed for the home where my husband and I learned to be married, where we found our footing as parents; the only home our son had ever known. "It's still here," he assured me. And it was: the first floor half-bath had been scraped clean, but stayed essentially the same; the old pantry gleamed with its new coat of glossy white paint. I treasured the cozy

remains of our 1938 starter home, but the light-filled bedrooms on the full second floor soared on the wings of the spirit of the new house. Soon I, too, would settle in and soar, invigorated by the renovation, the renewal, and the spirit of the Holy Ghost.

What do Jewish girls like me know from holy ghosts? The construction crew, the men who built our new house, who literally worked more than a month of Sundays to stay on schedule, was Mexican and Catholic. Even after they were long gone, toiling their hours of magic to transform other families' starter homes into dream homes, I felt their presence. Left behind, along with tiny plastic condiment cups from the take-out *polleria* down the street, their crushed Marlboro butts, and the occasional rusty nail, is their *duende*.

The *Duende*

The Spanish word *duende* has no English equivalent, but "captures an entire world of passion, energy, artistic excellence and describes a climactic show of spirit in a performance or work of art" (Moore, 2004, p. 35). Its literal meaning derives "from *duen de casa*, 'master of the house'" (Lorca, 1955/1998, p. ix), the *master* referring to an imp or a goblin, unseen, unknowable, but causing playful mischief, "hiding things, breaking dishes, causing noise, and making a general nuisance of himself" (p. ix). Although the builders' *duende* are hardly mischievous, I feel the presence of their powerful passions from crown moldings to downspouts.

The Spanish writer, Federico Garcia Lorca, delivered a lecture in the 1920s which became the famous published essay, "Play and Theory of the Duende" (1955/1998). "The duende," Lorca writes, "is a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought…the duende climbs up inside you, from the soles of the feet" (p. 49). I recall the feet of Ms. L,

jumping in excitement, shaking the floor of her portable classroom, so bodily moved by her students' "getting" the figurative language of Sylvia Plath. How do I express in language, in words on the page, the feeling that so moves Ms. L, and in turn, so moves her students and her observer? How do I, as teacher-researcher, translate her enthusiasm, her spirit, her *duende*, to my readers? An early response to the phenomenological question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?**, is that it's like being on a trampoline with your best friend, bouncing joyfully through the air, a veritable free fall from idea to idea, from the poetic to the concrete, back to the poetic again. The metaphoric imperative inherent in the phenomenological question and quest, "What is it like?" plays right into the hands of the impish and slippery *duende*. I want to catch the goblin by the tail, get a good look at it, and share its essential nature with my readers, while I simultaneously set it free to work its magic on the passions and possibilities of teachers and students in AP English.

Federico Garcia Lorca (1955/1998) writes about *duende* in terms of the character of Spanish national culture, using flamenco dancing (p. 52) and bullfighting (p. 59) as prime examples. Are we teachers flamenco dancing and bullfighting in the AP English classroom? Our students would certainly pay attention then. But Lorca also emphasizes, "Every art and in fact every country is capable of *duende*" (p. 55). When we teach with passion, when we teach from places within ourselves where love and desire reside, we are teaching with *duende*:

> Each art has a duende different in form and style, but their roots meet in a place where the black sounds…come from—the essential, uncontrollable, quivering, common base of wood, sound, canvas, and word.
>
> Behind those black sounds, tenderly and intimately, live zephyrs, ants, volcanoes, and the huge night, straining its waist against the Milky Way. (Lorca, 1955/1998, p. 61)

Including the teaching of English as an art of which Lorca writes, I rely on hermeneutic phenomenology as a way to gain access to the meeting place of the roots "where the black sounds come from" (Lorca, 1955/1998, p. 61), a place I sensed but never before noticed explicitly. As I journey to "the essential, uncontrollable, quivering, common base of wood, sound, canvas, and word," I report back to my readers in the lived voices of the "zephyrs, ants, volcanoes, and the huge night, straining its waist against the Milky Way" (Lorca, p. 61). I seek to capture the *duende* of teaching AP English, complete with its tensions, strains, and struggles, as a nature photographer seeks to capture only the images of wildlife while on safari. It is a slow, quiet journey, but I go-there and I know-there by engaging in the research activities of hermeneutic phenomenology.

But where will I go? What will I notice? How will I know which insights are worthwhile? I turn again to Lorca (1955/1998), as he asks, "Where is the duende?" (p. 62), and then offers this lyrical response:

> Through the empty arch comes a wind, a mental wind blowing relentlessly over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unknown accents; a wind that smells of baby's spittle, crushed grass, and jellyfish veil, announcing the constant baptism of newly created things. (p. 61)

I now venture "through the empty arch" in search of the "newly created things," that are truly new to me or have escaped earlier notice. Van Manen (2002) encourages me to trust my writerly intuition when thematizing, making meaning, and valuing my insights: "Writing is not just externalizing internal knowledge, rather it is the very act of making contact with the things of our world" (p. 126). The things that comprise the lived experience of teaching AP English may not smell of baby spittle, crushed grass, and jellyfish veil, but then again, they might. In the name of hermeneutic phenomenology, I

begin my journey, open to all the possibilities and all the scents in the wind as I proceed, "To the things themselves!" (Heidegger,1953/1996, p. 24).

A Phenomenological Schematic

> Phenomenology, as a disclosure of the world, rests on itself, or rather provides its own foundation. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2005, p. xxiii)

In this chapter, I explore the philosophical foundation of my phenomenological home, from whence I begin my journey, heeding the advice of Hurston's Janie Crawford, "You got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there" (Hurston, 1937/1998, p. 192). En route, I tend to the six research activities put forth by van Manen (2003, pp. 30-31). I have thus far considered the first four of van Manen's (2003) activities and the interplay among them:

> (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
> (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
> (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
> (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

Now I engage in the last two activities: "maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon" (van Manen, 2003, p. 31) and "balancing the research context by considering parts and whole" (van Manen, 2003, p. 31). It is both tempting and common to lose sight of the shore of one's orientation to the phenomenological whole, while distracted by the siren songs of baby spittle and jellyfish veils, and examining the individual blades of collective crushed grass. To stay the course, though it is not predetermined and I am free to drift, I rely on van Manen's (2003) three specific descriptors of hermeneutic phenomenology as "critically oriented action research": "critical," "pedagogic," and "personal" (p. 154). The three orientations are not directives, but lighthouse beacons. From the shore of hermeneutic phenomenology, they illuminate aspects of the phenomenon, while providing an inspiration and guidance for

balance and progress on the extended journey to know what it is like to teach AP English in public high school.

Critical Sensibility

"We can change the world/We can rearrange the world…," rocker Graham Nash (1990, track 11) sings in "Chicago," his counterculture anthem of 1971. My phenomenological reflections on what it is like to teach AP English in public high school are unlikely to change or even rearrange the world, but they may rock the lifeworld of the teacher-participants and of my readers, as they begin to notice in a new light the taken-for-granted aspects of the daily teaching lives of AP English teachers. As a critical philosophical orientation, "Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection deepens thought and therefore radicalizes thinking and the acting that flows from it" (van Manen, 2003, p. 154).

Finding and using our authentic voices in the AP English classroom will empower us to encourage our students to do the same. Although countless sets of standards, benchmarks, and exam questions may emanate from external entities to which we are beholden, i.e. the College Board, it is imperative to continue to sing our own songs, both old and new:

> My resistance to our practice of colonizing our students by insisting that they adopt our teacher's language extends to include my resistance to the educational researchers practicing the colonization of teachers through the claim that if teachers only knew what the research showed, they would surely stop speaking in their native teaching tongues and start speaking the language of research-approved curriculum practice. (Mirchochnik, 2002, p. 12)

Hermeneutic phenomenology illuminates varied trails toward multiple truths, insights, and understandings in its commitment to preserve the "native tongues" of the participants in their home-places of AP English classrooms. Through its reliance on lived

language through conversation and reflective writing, hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology strives to reveal and share, rather than to prove and coerce. As we seek the phenomenological nod over the blind acceptance of so-called indisputable fact, phenomenologists encourage and honor independence in thought, interpretation, and applications of meaning. Teaching, then, becomes a process of important, responsible decision making:

> With eyes wide open and riveted on learners, a further challenge to honest and righteous teachers is to stay wide-awake to the world, to the concentric circles of context in which we live and work…Teachers must always choose—they must choose how to see the students before them, how, as well, to see the world, what to embrace and what to reject, whether to support or resist this or that directive. ..It is only as teachers choose that that the ethical emerges. (Ayers, 2002, p. 43)

The revelations of this phenomenological inquiry may raise consciousness among teachers and other educators, or confirm incipient suspicions, propelling us into action to make our classrooms, our schools, and our testing policies more humane, and more sensitive to the needs and the lives of both students and their teachers. Although hermeneutic phenomenology is non-partisan and a-political, as a philosophical methodology it may uncover truths and injustices that spur its adherents to practical action, or praxis, in the realm of standardized testing, advanced placement programs, and pedagogic situations in public schools.

Pedagogic Sensibility

Van Manen (2003) states, “Pedagogic situations are always unique” (p. 155). As public schools rely more on standardization in curricula, in teaching, as well as in testing, now is an important time to consider the value of the hermeneutic phenomenology’s commitment to honoring a “theory of the unique” (van Manen, 2003, p. 155) in educational research, over the more generalized and generalizable theories that public

education tends to favor: “The increasing bureaucratization of pedagogic institutions and the technologizing effect of educational research and knowledge forms tend to erode our understanding of praxis of pedagogic competence in everyday life” (van Manen, p. 157). Though some of my readers may be hoping for a quick fix on how to raise test scores or close a minority achievement gap in AP English programs, the hope and faith of my inquiry into the lived experiences of AP English teachers in public school lie in providing a deeper understanding of the “good” (van Manen, p. 157), or the “pedagogic competence” (p. 157) we seek to foster in ourselves as teachers.

What is good pedagogy? What is the experience of good pedagogy in AP English? Is pedagogy, by its essential nature of teaching, inherently good? Derived from the Latin *paedagogus*, an obsolete meaning of pedagogue refers to “a slave who supervised children, including taking them to and from school” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1991, p. 1334). Although we may have days when our chosen vocation feels more akin to slavery than professional employment, to-be in a pedagogical relationship with children is to be “*in loco parentis* toward all those children entrusted to [our] care” (van Manen, 1991, p. 5). Indeed, there are teachers who have earned state certification, but may remain “pedagogically unfit” (van Manen, p. 9) as they lack the understanding, skills, and/or willingness to approach teaching as a parenting, nurturing, and caring endeavor. Van Manen defines “good pedagogy” as having:

> a sense of vocation, love of and caring for children, a deep sense of responsibility, moral intuitiveness, self-critical openness, thoughtful maturity, tactful sensitivity toward the child’s subjectivity, an interpretive intelligence, a pedagogical understanding of the child’s needs, improvisational resoluteness in dealing with young people, a passion for knowing and learning the mysteries of the world, the moral fibre to stand up for something, a certain understanding of the world, active hope in the face of prevailing crises, and, not the least, humor and vitality. (1991, p. 8)

A tall order at any salary, to strive for pedagogical competence is a lifelong commitment to and orientation toward teaching, learning, and being-with children. What van Manen (1991) terms “pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact” (p. 187) is developed “through the practice of teaching, but not simply by teaching itself” (p. 208). Phenomenologically reflecting on our practice, on our daily experiences with our students as lived, will develop our awareness and strengthen our development of pedagogical competence in the AP English classroom. Our commitment to improve the *collective* pedagogical good in AP programs in public schools, is also a commitment to “engage in *personal* action” (van Manen, 2003, p. 154) for specific teachers and students in specific situations.

Personal Sensibility

Hermeneutic phenomenology appeals to a collective spirit, but it also requires a personal commitment to and engagement with the phenomenon. As a teacher, a researcher, and a parent, “I feel responsible to act out of a *full understanding* of what is it like to be in this world as a child” (van Manen, 2002, p. 155, emphasis added). What are the sources of my full understanding of what it is like to be in this world as a child? At my age, when I mine memory as a source, my inquiry becomes archaeological as I excavate through years of personal experience. When I rely on current lived experience, as a parent and as a teacher, my work is informed by what I already know about being-with children. I consider the differences and similarities between teaching other people’s children at school, and raising my own child at home. I seek to know and make explicit my personal understanding of what it is like to-be with students in the AP classroom, and to explore the personal understanding of the participants in my study.

Van Manen (1991) encourages us in our research "to start with life itself" (p. 214) and to "situate our reflections about education and child rearing in the particular society and culture in which we live this life" (p. 214). In situating ourselves in our lifeworlds, and making meaning through the process of phenomenological thematizing and writing, we also make connections with new external sources, including philosophers, novels, poems, and other art forms. What we read, think about, and appreciate also signify personal choices. Even when teaching standardized curricula in an exam-driven course, "we teach who we are" (Palmer, 1998, p. 2). In teaching who we are, even if we are not-yet and always in the process of becoming, our personal commitment and engagement are uniquely ours.

In my study of the lived experience of AP English teachers, my research life, my teaching life, my reading life, and my family life are not distinctly separate entities. "Phenomenological engagement is always personal engagement" (van Manen, 2002, p. 156), and my research integrates my lived experience with the lived experience of the teacher-participants in this study. I sought an intimacy in my research endeavor. My sensitivity to the nuances of AP students' situations, and to the *advanced placement* of their teachers who are caught in the tension between teaching a college-level course to high school students in a high school classroom geared toward a single exam, and teaching a sophisticated, meaningful college-level literature and writing course worthy of three to six college credits, keeps me oriented to the phenomenon that I am poised to explore in depth, in earnest, and in intimate, tactful detail.

Phenomenological Construction Plans

But for me, numbers just do not mean much. (Howard, 2002, p. 58)

A good friend, a sociologist by training, recently quipped, “The only numbers in your dissertation will be the page numbers.” Humorous, yet not far from the truth. In this phenomenological study of the lived experience of teaching AP English, I engage with six AP English teachers who are currently teaching in local public schools. The teacher-participants are experienced teachers of English with at least three years of public high school English teaching experience, who are currently teaching at least one section of AP English in public school. I invited teachers who were my colleagues, or were recommended by colleagues, based on their passion for and commitment to teaching, literature, and their students. The teachers became conversants in my study by accepting my Invitation to Participate (see Appendix C), and by signing the Informed Consent (see Appendix D) upon our initial meeting.

The conversants in the study range in age from 25 to 45, and have from 3 to 18 years experience teaching high school English, with between 2 and 10 years of experience teaching AP English. One participant began her teaching career as a college professor and still teaches a university course every summer. All teacher-conversants are currently teaching at least two sections of AP English, with one teacher teaching AP Language (AP Lang) to seniors, while another is teaching AP Lit as a full-year course first semester, and AP Lang as a full-year course second semester. I engaged my teacher-participants in conversations beginning in October 2007 and ending in February 2008. With each teacher-participant, I recorded and transcribed at least two conversations of approximately 60-90 minutes.

During this time span between October 2007 to February 2008, the teachers kept a reflective journal and wrote a minimum of four entries, the prompts for which I devised

to stir thinking and tap into their experience of living in the tension between teaching and testing, as they engaged with students, literature, and other teachers, in and beyond the AP English classroom. I, too, kept a reflective journal through the text-generating process. The choices of prompts for reflective journal entries included: Tell the story of how you became an AP English teacher; What advice would you give to a beginning AP English teacher, as you draw from your pedagogic stories of remembrance?; Generate a list of truths and a list of myths about teaching AP English in public high school, and how you came to distinguish the difference; Tell about a favorite or inspirational teacher from your own schooling. Our journal entries provided text for further meaning-making in the writing of my thematizing chapter.

After completing the first round of conversations with each participant and collecting a minimum of two journal entries, I began thematizing the typed transcripts of our conversations and journals. I shared my initial theme ideas with the conversants during our second round of conversations; they shared both verbal insights through our conversations, and written insights through the second round of journal entries, which I collected at the end of the study period in February 2008. The complete transcribed conversations and journal entries formed a phenomenological text from which I determined structures of meaning, which I introduce and explore in Chapter Four as named themes.

The words that I gathered from my one-on-one conversations with AP English teachers and our reflective journaling comprise the textual data for my study; the parts of which emerge as a unified, yet textured, phenomenological whole. What I hope emerges from my gathering and constructed text is a series of teacher narratives connected by

unifying themes and *sensus communis*, the sense we have in common. Before facilitating the conversations, transcribing the texts, and reading the teachers' writings, I did not know what themes would be revealed. In my process of meaning-making thematic identification, I bracketed out my preconceived notions of what is it like for me to teach AP English, and listened instead to the experiences of others, as informed by the lived experiences of a group of teachers expressed through their lived language, and revealed through the phenomenological lens of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived community.

Thematic Renderings

My earliest re-collection of naming themes comes from my ninth grade English class with Mrs. Mikulak. Along with Freytag's Pyramid of Plot Structure (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement), came this list of conflicts: man versus man, man versus nature, man versus society, and man versus himself. It was the 1970s tube-top method of literary analysis for adolescents—one-size-fits-all. For any short story, novel, or play we studied in class, we could diagram its plot structure on Freytag's pyramid, and identify its themes by choosing one or more conflicts from the man-versus-whomever list. Conflict equaled theme in those early days of literature study. The most enthusiastic among us could add abstract concepts like unrequited love (*Romeo and Juliet*), envy—not to be confused with jealousy (*A Separate Peace*), and lawlessness (*Lord of the Flies*, "Kill the pig!"). It was a functional, if limited, introduction to literary analysis, and it certainly stuck; over three decades later it remains fresh in my mind.

As I would soon learn from my eleventh grade English teacher, Mr. Froysland, with the help of Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Bernard Malamud, and others, plot

and theme were not always as simple as Mrs. Mikulak taught us, and by that time, neither was my life. As more complicated conflicts caught my attention in literature, in my lifeworld, and in the world beyond East Grand Rapids High School, I began to question and try to embrace the slippery complexities of growing up. I attempted to name and describe my discoveries through class discussion, essay writing, and the more creative outlets of writing poetry, stories, and keeping a diary. By far, my most valuable lessons in how to make sense of the world and "report out" to an audience, came from high school English class.

I engage in a similar activity of meaning-making now, as I thematize the lived experience of the conversants in my study of AP English teachers caught in the tension between teaching and testing. Van Manen (2003) defines theme as "at best a simplification" (p. 87), but also as a description of "an aspect of structure of lived experience" (p. 87). Though the teacher-participants had moments of conflict in their teaching lives, man versus test was not an option on Mrs. Mikulak's list, and I avoid oversimplifying the participants' experiences by choosing from my ninth grade man-versus-man list of themes. Instead, I gather to-gether how we came to know ourselves, our students, and our teaching in-context as I explore the phenomenological question: **What is it like to teach AP English in public schools while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?**

Conversational Relations

The richest source of material came from our informal one-on-one conversations. Despite taking place at the end of full, exhausting teaching days, which in many instances were extended by extracurricular activities long after I left, the teachers were eager and

articulate conversants. We often found ourselves continuing our discussions after I turned off the tape recorder, on the way to the front door, and out to the parking lot. The first round of conversations began in October, with the second round ending in February—these were cold weather talks, but warmth was the only feeling I ever experienced, from the moment I met the teachers for the first time in their classrooms.

The original Latin meaning of the noun *conversation* is "frequent abode" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008), with an obsolete definition of "the action of living or having one's being *in* a place or *among* persons" *(OED Online,* 1989/2008). I was a stranger to five out of the six teachers in the study, yet I immediately felt at-ease with them and at-home in their classrooms. Our conversations were natural dialogues, with no need for stimulating conversation starters or probing questions. Van Manen (2003) writes of the hermeneutic interview or conversation, "It is talking together like friends" (p. 98), and indeed, it was.

In its adjectival form, *conversant* describes "dwelling habitually or frequently, accustomed to live or abide, passing much of one's time, *in* a place" *(OED Online,* 1989/2008), as well as "concerned, occupied, or having to do *with* (things)" *(OED Online,* 1989/2008). In the sense of dwelling-in-a-place and concerned-with-the-things-themselves, I was "conversant" with the conversants in the study as our conversations wandered through the complexities of **what it is like to teach AP English in public high school, while caught in the tension between teaching and testing**, and wondered what meaning we could make of our shared-yet-separate experiences.

The results of my study do not yield a primer on how to improve AP test scores, how to retain quality teachers, or how to design an AP English syllabus worthy of the College Board stamp of approval. My insights will not catapult an individual school

higher on Jay Mathews' Challenge Index (2006). The valued end of this phenomenological study is to address and reveal multiple facets of the question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?** It is my hope that my inquiry, through the phenomenological practice of gathering, reflecting, thematizing, writing, and rewriting, reveals the passions and possibilities for humane pedagogy in an era of high stakes testing. "Between my finger and my thumb/The squat pen rests./I'll dig with it" (Heaney, 1998, p. 4).

CHAPTER FOUR:
BETWEEN ART AND CRAFT—TEACHING ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH IN THE CLASSROOM-WORKSHOP

Coming to Craft in the Teaching of Advanced Placement English

> Children once learned the arts and crafts of being a grown-up by belonging to a community whose habits and rituals they naturally absorbed. (Meier, 2002, p. 11)

Educator Deborah Meier (2002) writes in her book, *In Schools We Trust*, that until a century ago, most children did not go to school, but instead learned their way to adulthood by being in the company of adults in small communities, from farms to factories to multigenerational family homes. Fortunately, schools replaced workplaces as more appropriate settings for growing children, but as a result, children tend to spend less time with adults, and more time alone and with peers. As I explore the phenomenological question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?**, I am in-conversation with teacher-participants whose classrooms are reminiscent of the communities of yore to which Meier alludes. Hardly an early twentieth century shoe factory or sheep farm, the AP English classroom is a multigenerational site of process and productivity for both teachers and students, fueled by their shared passions-in-progress and ever-present possibilities.

Through practiced habits and in-grained rituals, the Advanced Placement (AP) English classrooms resemble medieval workshops; teaching and learning communities where "the arts and crafts of being a grown-up," are being passed on-to a generation of young literary apprentices. The high school students engaged in Advanced Placement English study, for which they may earn college credit if they earn a qualifying score on the College Board exam in May, learn the arts and crafts of alleged college-level literary analysis in the high school setting. What is it like for AP English teachers to foster a

lifelong love of literature and learning with student-apprentices who may be more focused on test scores than on acquiring "the arts and crafts of becoming a grown up"? What is the experience of grown-up teachers sharing their art and their craft with adolescent students who may not yet share the passion, or value literature, beyond the realm of grades and tests? What does it mean to naturally absorb "habits and rituals of being a grown up" in a classroom setting that may be geared toward performing well on a high-stakes, high school test, unlike any the students will ever have in college, or anywhere else in their adult lives?

The etymological root of the noun of action *habit* is the Latin, *to be.* To-be in AP English class is, in habit's verb form, to in-habit or to dwell (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Aside from our yearly study of Hamlet's famous, "To be or not to be" soliloquy, what is it like to-be or to-dwell in the teaching of AP English? What is it like to in-habit our teaching of AP English, and to-dwell in our classrooms with our students? In Chapter Two, I allude to Heidegger's question, "What is it to dwell?" In the Heideggerian sense, to-dwell is to in-habit Da-sein, "that entity or aspect of our humanness which is capable of wondering about its own existence" (van Manen, 2003, p. 176). In-conversation with six teacher-participants in this study of teaching AP English in public high school, I name aspects of the teachers' habits as they share the rituals—the coming to terms with what is, as well as the coming of age or rite-of-passage experience for students in earning college credit for a high school course—that in-habit and in-form the teaching of AP English.

The ritual in taking students through an AP English course, to learn the basics of literary analysis, to pass a timed exam, and to earn college credit, marks a yearly rite-of-passage for the teachers who are guiding the students, and for the students who are

practicing the art and craft of literature study, writing, and test-taking in the AP English classroom. The road to the test, during the course of school year, is paved with many mini-rituals, from multiple choice practice tests to vocabulary quizzes to course term *Jeopardy*. The word *ritual*, from the root word *rite*, derives from the Latin *ritus* or ceremony, whose derivation is the religious meaning of sacredness or sacrament (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). The adjective *sacred* derives from the Latin etymology to set apart as holy. Though the teaching of AP English is not a religious activity, what is it like to-be set a-part from other realms of high school English teaching? What in the teaching of AP English might be considered "holy"? In the current climate of high-stakes testing as the sometimes single measure of student "achievement," a tendency exists to worship at the altar of the College Board, and to deify the Advanced Placement exam, as the only pathway to challenging course work for students in public high school.

The etymology of *holy* is uncertain, but it could derive from "inviolate, inviolable, that must be preserved *whole* or intact" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). As we parse excerpts of novels, plays, and poetry during test practice and close reading exercises, what wholeness do we preserve? Is our dedication to our students, our pedagogy, and our love of the literature, the faith that keeps "whole" our sometimes fragmented test-centered teaching and learning? *Holy* may also derive from health, well-being, or good omen (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Are our "holy rituals" in the AP English classroom healthy for our students? Good for our well-being as teachers? Can our engaging of students in "meritorious literature" while emphasizing high test scores be beneficial for our students? Does the work we do with-students in AP English portend a "good future," regardless of test scores?

I write in Chapter Two that the AP English teacher "dwells aright" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 163) in several in-between places: between teaching and testing, between "curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived" (p. 163), and between high school and college. Where do AP English teachers dwell when their AP classes set them a-part from other courses in their schools and in their departments? All six teacher-participants in the study teach both AP and non-AP courses during their work day. What is the experience of traveling from one realm to the other, and back again, as the bells ring for class change? What is the experience of in-habiting the myriad in-between places with students who may not yet dwell-aright in the "Zone of Between" (p. 163)? What is the experience of passing-on habits and rituals in "the arts and crafts of being a grown up" (Meier, 2002, p. 11)? Finally, what is the experience of being in-between art and craft in the AP English classroom?

As I continued my phenomenological journey to uncover and to name **what it is like to teach Advanced Placement English in public school, while caught in the tension between teaching and testing**, I summoned Lewis Carroll's Alice in the *Wonderland* sequel, *Alice's Adventures Through the Looking-glass*, and sidled through the Looking-glass until it melted into a mist, and "noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible" (Carroll, 1960, p. 186). From my "old room" as teacher of AP English Literature (AP Lit), to my new perch as teacher-researcher and hermeneutic phenomenologist, my wonder-ing leads to my wander-ing through the Looking-glass to view "all the rest" and find it "as different as possible." With a fresh perspective, poised and prepared to share my adventures in the Wonder-land that is the teaching of AP

English in public school, my gaze is trained up-on those places of dwelling aright in the Zone of Between, the individual and collective classrooms of AP English teachers.

Madhatter's Tea Party: Coming Up-on the Guest List

A-kin to Alice, I was open to meet, greet, and get-to-know the cast of characters, the in-habitants of the new places in which I found myself. Unlike Alice, I did not happen up-on them purely by chance. I extended the invitations to six participants who came recommended from colleagues as passionate teachers of AP English, who were knowledgeable in their subject area, who had warm and respectful rapport with their students, and who would enjoy conversing about teaching and learning.

With nary a zany Madhatter or capricious Queen of the Hearts among them, the six teachers of Advanced Placement English who participated in my study from October 2007 through February 2008, were gracious, giving, and completely sane, despite the enormous professional demands made on their time from students, parents, administrators, and their myriad extracurricular responsibilities. Their stories and in-sights, gathered from conversations and journals, in-form my interpretive reading of the complexities of the question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English in public school, while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?**

Yearbook Pages: Senior Section

With the exception of one teacher, the conversants were all super-involved in the extracurricular realm of their schools, with several sponsoring the school publications: literary magazines, newspapers, and yearbooks. I graduated from high school in the days before glossy, glamorous, high-priced yearbooks, with a senior section featuring a full-page "personal ad" devoted to each graduate. Instead, in my day, the graduates had a

simple headshot with a quotation, followed by a list of interests, activities, and affiliations. To introduce the participants in my study, I conjure up the days of yearbooks past, where each "senior" has a portrait, a quotation, and a list of significant activities and details. I adapt this approach looking at the photograph I took of each participant at her desk in her classroom after school, followed by a choice quote uttered in the earliest moments of our acquaintance and captured on tape, and finally, an introduction by way of interests, activities, and anecdotes. Rather than the traditional alphabetical order, I introduce the participants by first names (pseudonyms) in order of our initial conversation.

"I am a walking cliché," **Lisa** tells me at our first meeting, referring to her personal and professional satisfaction in teaching high school English, particularly AP Lit. Making early career shifts in her mid-twenties, from writing for a magazine to teaching acting and directing children's theater, she stumbled into high school English teaching after vowing never to become a teacher, her mother's profession. She reflects on her six years of high school teaching:

> Teaching AP Literature in this setting has been the most fulfilling time in my life. Finally I have a job where I do not dread Sundays for bringing the week ahead, where (despite the early hour) getting up in the morning does not leave a pit in my stomach. I guess that means I'm doing what I'm meant to do.

Her "doing what I'm meant to do" utterance, preceded her assertion that she was "a walking cliché." Lisa finds naming her contentment in her career choice as "a calling," a bit contrived, but realizes it may indeed describe her reality. Lisa spends long hours at school, for in addition to AP Lit, Lisa teaches journalism classes and advises both the newspaper and the yearbook staffs. Lisa is also pregnant with her first child when we meet in October. We quickly discover that her due date and the due date for the end of

my research study are about the same. We work out the logistics, and her willingness to find time in her demanding schedule to participate in this study by sitting down for after-school conversations and keeping a reflective journal are nothing short of remarkable. Her passion for teaching in general, and for teaching AP Lit in particular, are apparent from our first conversation, as is her friendly rapport with her students.

A few minutes into our conversation, two students come in offering Lisa candy. Lisa politely declines, but one student insists, "It's for the baby." Lisa assures her that the baby doesn't need a Starburst yet, thank you very much, and besides, the sugar may make him go crazy and come out, right now! With screams and laughs, the students are on their way. Lisa and I resume our conversation, and it's clear that Lisa is a wonderful combination of warm and playful; demanding and serious. Her work area is a testament to her deft mix of the professional and the personal. A pair of giant A-Z bookends on the windowsill contains a long line of teaching texts, from *Black Boy* to *Classic Fairy Tales* to *The School Newspaper Advisor's Handbook.* Her desk is an organized jumble of folders, knick-knacks, and her romantic wedding photo by the sea. Lisa's classroom is her teaching home, and it's clear from her candy-proffering students that it is their home, too.

Amy's classroom is also reflective of a warm and welcoming personality and teaching style. She tells me at our first meeting, "I want to do it, the way I want do it." And she does it with great gusto. Amy's photo is the lone action shot in my yearbook's senior section, although she's sitting behind her desk, she's energetically wielding the remote control, shoulder-length hair flying as she points the remote toward the television hanging from the ceiling. Her athleticism—she has been on softball, basketball, tennis,

and swim teams —is apparent. She is also the only teacher in her school, and in our school system, who teaches Advanced Placement Language (AP Lang), traditionally an eleventh grade course, to seniors. As the Lone Ranger of AP Lang for seniors, she prepares students for the AP Lang exam with its emphasis on rhetoric in non-fiction over literature, by relying on the texts of AP Lit. Several teachers in this study remarked that students arriving in AP Lit senior year have missed out on literature study junior year by taking AP Lang and not reading fiction, drama, or poetry. Some teachers resent having to fill in gaps for students who basically missed a full year of literature study. Amy, however, relies on literature to teach the close reading analysis and rhetorical strategies both required by the test, and by her guidelines of what constitutes a college-level English course.

The students who take AP Lang senior year at Amy's school do not consider themselves strong in English, and elected to take honors English in junior year, rather than the more challenging junior English course, AP Lang. Typically, Amy's students are strong in math and science, not the humanities, but are encouraged by parents, teachers, and/or guidance counselors to take at least one AP course in the humanities before college. Many students, too, are hoping for college credit and exemption from freshmen English in college to better focus on their science and math-oriented majors. Amy, once a pre-med major, is also well-versed in math and science, a rarity among English teachers. She even advises the school's engineering and space technology club. Her favorite high school English teacher predicted, as Amy went off to college, that her passion for English was so deep that despite being from a family of physicians, her pre-med days were numbered and that she would switch to English early in her undergraduate career. After

an intensive life sciences summer program before her freshmen year, she decided to leave the lab and pursue her interest in literature and writing by majoring in English. She may be the engineering club sponsor, but she is also the forensics coach, and in the past has directed the school's plays and advised the literary magazine. In addition to playing sports, Amy is also known for her globetrotting, and leads student trips to exotic places around the world every spring break.

I travel north, beyond the Washington Beltway, to meet teacher-participant, Katherine, at a brand new high school in the exurbs. While we're still shaking hands, **Katherine** informs me: "I am not your ideal candidate." Her pronouncement stays with me throughout the study, and I smile every time I think of it, just as I did upon its first mention. She explains, "I've been thinking about your question about being caught in the tension between teaching and testing, and I don't know that I feel that tension with AP as much as I do with other classes." With that explanation, Katherine opens up a new pathway for my thinking. In the era of multiple standardized tests—in Maryland we are beholden to High School Assessments (HSA) in English, government, mathematics, and science—the AP tests shine in comparison.

I assure Katherine that she is indeed my ideal candidate. With her PhD in English, nine years of college teaching, eight years of high school teaching, and continued summer university teaching, she is the consummate dedicated professional. With her passionate commitment to practical and reflective pedagogy, and love of thoughtful conversation, Katherine brings a multifaceted perspective to our work together. Katherine is just slightly younger than I am. Having come of age under similar trends in literature instruction (context? what context?) and writing instruction (process? what process?), we

share commonalities and quickly discover a short hand in our dialogue. While several of the younger participants in the study can view their college experiences close-up without the use of a telephoto lens, Katherine has the added perspective of one who has taught and is still teaching in the university setting. Her insights are deep gazes into what transpires post-AP English, when our students find themselves in actual college English courses taught in college.

I am also indebted to Katherine for introducing me to the "lasagna desk effect," those layers of papers, folders, and notebooks that accumulate throughout a busy teacher's day. Katherine teaches a whopping four sections of AP English, three AP Lit and one AP Lang, as well as one section of English 9. The layers of metaphorical noodles, cheese, and sauce which comprise her desk matter, remind me of my phenomenological study and the work we are all doing together as teachers, both with and without our students. It's a delightfully messy meal, yet delicious and rich all the same.

Meeting **James** introduced yet another layer of complexity, as his school was undergoing major renovations, and I had some difficulty locating him in the veritable shantytown of portable classrooms that had been erected for the duration. When I finally find his classroom for our first scheduled visit, I'm told by his colleague that he was called home. We reschedule for a later date, and I finally find James' portable classroom with James in it. He sits at his desk, and above him on the board is this quote of the day, attributed to Dorothy Parker: "The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity." I recall hearing early in my teaching career that curiosity cannot be taught, and I still wonder about that. James immediately shares, as a kind of warning, that his wife

has dubbed him, “the master of the disclaimer.” As one who doesn’t “own” the temporary classroom that he’s in, to his tendency to preface many of his remarks with, yes, a disclaimer, I find that his wife’s description is accurate.

James is 39 years old and has been teaching for thirteen years, and has both private and public school experience. This is his third year of teaching AP Lit, although Mr. Disclaimer taught AP Lit in private school over ten years ago, but dis-counts that experience as “a little silly.” James also produces the school plays, and is the acting coach, as well as the dramaturge.

James’ principal, a fellow phenomenologist, recommended James to me in part on the richness of James’ lived language. Despite (or due to) his penchant for disclaiming, James is an articulate, thoughtful, and complex conversant, with a wide range of literary interests, pedagogical insights, and a candid appraisal of the role of testing in his daily teaching. He told me that friends and colleagues have often asked: “Have you ever thought about teaching college? You seem more academic. You treat kids more like they’re equals. You don’t come across as somebody who talks down to kids.” But from the beginning of his teaching career, James wanted to teach AP. James began teaching AP Lit midyear, to fill in temporarily for a colleague on leave, but ended up teaching it permanently, and concludes, “I’ve been delighted ever since.” James attributes his being tapped mid-year to teach AP to the fact that he “read [his] head off” for many years, and has “a very deep knowledge base.” He describes himself as “largely self-educated.”

James is also a writer. He has aspirations to publish but describes what he believes are his obstacles, “I’m lazy and I procrastinate.” When a friend offered to type up his drawer full of manuscripts and submit them for publication, he replied, “I’m not

worthy of this generous offer." Instead, he applied for a writing fellowship in his early years of teaching, and was the first runner-up. He was pleased with the positive and personal feedback he received from the fellowship committee, and concluded, "In my better moments, I think should do more with my writing." But for now, James channels his literary energy into his teaching and his students.

Amanda is the youngest participant in the study. A petite twenty-five-year old, her photograph would look at home in the real senior section of our high school yearbook. Although she appears every bit the high school senior or young college student, upon talking to her, she immediately comes across as a self-assured, commanding, and thoughtful pedagogical practitioner. Although her youth and vibrancy make me feel like her grandma, we're engaged in an equal conversational partnership as soon as we sit down to talk. In her third year of teaching, and second year of teaching AP, she tells of "a very young English department…with a very high turnover."

"In fact," she continues, "I'm the head of the AP Lit team and the twelfth grade team, if that tells you anything." She goes on to explain that at the age of 25, with two years of AP teaching, she is "probably the most experienced" of the AP English teachers at her school. She also teaches journalism, advises the school newspaper, and teaches ninth grade English.

When I first meet her in the journalism office, she leaves the independent and industrious newspaper staff, while we have an uninterrupted conversation in her adjoining classroom. Amanda is comfortable in-habiting at least two worlds at her school, as the journalism office and her literature classroom are two distinct places, whose doorway she passes through with ease throughout the day, and I suspect, late into the

evening. A former business major, she switched to English when Flannery O'Connor's short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," came up for discussion in her Ethics class in business school. Reuniting with one of her favorite short stories in this context reminded her of how much she loved to study literature, and how much she missed it. She left behind the goal of making the big bucks in business, and went instead for the big passion, dwelling-in literature and writing with kids as a high school English teacher.

Tina is the only participant in the study with whom I once taught. Tina left our school system five years ago to work closer to home. She is 35 years old, and has been teaching high school English for ten years; AP English for six. The setting in which Tina now teaches is quite different from the school and school system she left. We taught together in the outer suburbs of Washington, DC, but Tina's new district is even farther from the city, more rural, smaller, less bureaucratic, and a bit "behind the times." As we teach the term "setting" in literature class as place and time, Tina's teaching time is also different in her new setting. Due to a strict adherence to block scheduling and semesterized courses throughout Tina's county, all full-year courses are taught by semester in ninety-minute blocks. Tina teaches AP Lit in the fall and AP Lang in the spring; recommended seniors must choose between AP Lit and AP Lang. They are expected to take the AP Lit and/or AP Lang test in the spring, even though they finish the AP Lit course in the first semester. AP Lang is not available to juniors, and students at Tina's school do not have the option of taking both AP English courses. As a result of the block scheduling, and culture and expectations of the school and school system, few students take the AP English exams, and of those few who take them—12 out of 54

students took last year's AP Lit exam—only 50%, or six students, passed by earning a score of three or higher. There were no fives.

Tina is not discouraged, but rather energized, as she has the freedom, autonomy, and motivation to build an AP program from the ground up, starting with the lower grades. The challenge of raising students to a higher level of thinking, reading and writing, while engaging them more thoughtfully to ignite passions, more fully commits Tina to the cause. Living in and for the bigger picture hearkens back to Tina's initial foray into literature as lifework.

Before becoming a high school teacher, Tina was a doctoral candidate in English at George Washington University with every intention of becoming a college professor. To earn extra money while in graduate school, Tina worked as a substitute English teacher in the public schools and quickly found that high school teaching suited her and her financial situation. She switched from her PhD program to the master's in education program, and has been content in practicing the art and craft of teaching high school English ever since.

Teaching AP English as Craft

I write in Chapter Two that the teaching of AP English is the teaching of art; in addition to the art of the literature itself, we study the art of literary analysis, the art of thinking, writing, and speaking about literature, and even the art of standardized test-taking. Through the activity of thematizing the phenomenological text that I gathered-with the six teacher-participants in this study, I have come to name AP English teaching not only as an art, but also as a craft. Sennett (2008) posits: "In terms of practice, there is no art without craft; the idea for a painting is not a painting" (p. 65). In our study,

appreciation, and analysis of the art of poetry, fiction, and drama in AP English, we also practice the craft of thinking, writing, and speaking about literature. Applebee (1996) quotes Polanyi: “Rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of an art” (p. 11). The practice of art requires the practice of craft. Through our teaching of AP English, our students become our apprentices in the workshop of literary analysis and standardized test-taking. What is the experience of practicing the craft of teaching AP English in public school? What is it like for teachers to be master-craftspeople, in their classroom-workshops, with their student-apprentices?

Among the etymological roots of the noun *craft* is the Icelandic adjective for *strong*, and the nouns “strength, force, power, virtue” in German (*OED Online*, 1989/2007). Our strong passions for the art and craft of literature and writing, and our motivating desire to share our passions with our students have been a powerful force throughout our lives. An obsolete definition of *craft* in English is “intellectual power” and “occult art, magic” (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). The craft of teaching AP English stems from the power of the passions stirred in the early brew of the teacher-participants’ education, both in and beyond school. The strength of our youthful attachment to the written word developed the teacher-participants’ intellectual skills, while casting a magical spell of literary enchantment that we now share with our students throughout the school year in our classroom-workshops.

Teaching AP English as Parenting

Though the concepts of craft, craftsmen, and craftsmanship, may bring to mind images of the manual labors of carpentry, masonry, and welding, we can add teaching AP English in public school as “a way of life” (Sennett, 2008, p. 9) that craftsmanship

includes. The teaching of AP English in public schools fits this definition of craftsmanship put forth by Richard Sennett in his book, *The Craftsman* (2008):

> Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labor; it serves the computer programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship. (p. 9)

Teaching, particularly teaching AP English, names "an enduring, basic human impulse" for the six teacher-participants in this study. Their "desire to do a job well for its own sake" can be read from the etymological history of the word *desire*, from Old French originally signifying "lack," rather than "wanting" (Ayto, 1990, p. 166). What is "lacking" and what is "wanting" in the teaching of AP English? What wants or desires emerge from places of emptiness, longing, or yearning, in the drive "to do a job well for its own sake"? The teacher-participants sense a lack in what they can and should do for their students within the confines of the school day and year, and are never satisfied with "good enough." Conversant James shares, "I am a very self-critical person; I am always pushing myself to get better. In teaching AP, I find myself constantly wondering, 'Is this enough?'"

Though Sennett does not list teaching as part of the "wider swath" included in the definition of craftsmanship, we can consider his mention of parenting as a "skilled craft" similar to teaching. I write in Chapter Three of *in loco parentis* as a "primary pedagogical responsibility" (van Manen, 1993, p. 5). Van Manen (1993) also writes:

> Parenting and teaching derive from the same fundamental experience of pedagogy: the human charge of protecting and teaching the young to live in this world and to take responsibility for themselves, for others, and for the continuance and welfare of the world. (p. 7)

What is the experience of "protecting and teaching the young" while simultaneously preparing them for a three-hour College Board exam? What are we teaching our students about responsibility for themselves and "the continuance and welfare of the world" when we time them every Friday on practice multiple choice tests? What job are we doing "well for its own sake" when we are driven to push our students to earn high test scores? What "skilled craft" are we practicing and passing-on to our students in the AP English classroom?

Good Work

Sennett (2008) writes, "In all these domains, craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself" (p. 9). Reminiscent of the phenomenological call, "To the things themselves!" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 24), the thing-in-itself, the "objective standards" that the teacher-craftsperson may find "conflicting," is the tension between teaching and testing, and between art and craft, in the AP English classroom:

> Schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality. ..The craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence; the desire to do something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressure, by frustration, or by obsession. (Sennett, 2008, p. 9)

The schools do not always provide the necessary tools "to do good work." Again, "the *desire* to do something well for its own sake" derives from a lack, a lack of "tools" and a lack of understanding of what the experience is like for classroom teachers, as well as a "wanting" for a better situation. What necessary "tools" does an AP teacher need to do her "good work"? What constitutes the "good" in good work? Greene (1973) writes:

> No image of a single, objective "good" guides the search for the best way to proceed, because the good (according to Dewey) is never twice the same…The good is thus associated with some nonmoral value or values: a type of fulfillment or enjoyment; the satisfaction of certain interests; the release of tension. (p. 247)

As our classroom situations, class rosters, and teaching conditions vary from year to year, from day to day, or even from class period to class period, the experience of our good work is alive, adaptive, and ever-changing, much like the teenagers we dwell among in our classrooms. The etymology of *good* from Old Teutonic is "to bring together, unite" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What disparate things does our "good" work in AP English bring together or gather as we dwell aright in the Zone of Between? What is it like to experience "the release of tension" that our gathering engenders? When we gather students and teacher, students and texts, texts and tests, and students and tests, are we doing our good work with the right tools?

What is the experience of the AP English teacher in the workshop practicing her craft without adequate tools? What is it like to aspire for "quality" in the face of conflicting "standards of excellence"? The "aspiration for quality" may take on different meanings for teachers than for administrators, central office personnel, and state departments of education. The unmistakable desire "to do a job well for its own sake" is certainly complicated, and perhaps, "impaired by competitive pressure, by frustration, or by obsession" that derives from the College Board, its yearly exam-for-credit, and the metaphorical bleachers packed with score-spectators on the sidelines, from students and parents, to administrators and central office personnel, to the media and the College Board. How do teacher-participants, master craftsmen in the AP English workshop, experience "the conflicting objective standards of excellence" that are externally-imposed?

The etymology of the noun *standard* derives from Latin *estendere*, to extend (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). One can understand a standard, then, as an opportunity to

extend one's knowledge, to reach for a goal, to stretch oneself to explore possibilities and potentialities. In this sense of *standard,* we can stretch or pull to our "full size," (*OED Online*, 1989/2008), or we can "stretch out forcibly, strain" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). In Advanced Placement English, students are *advanced* to a *place-ment* where they are not-yet, namely, college-level English in high school. Is the experience of "advanced placement" an age-appropriate stretch beyond "full size," an unreasonable-forced strain, or both? What is like for AP English teachers to stretch their students without hurting them? What is the experience of guiding, stretching, and teaching without forcing, straining, and coercing? What, if any, stretch or strain, do the teachers experience while preparing, teaching, and grading?

The word *standard* worked its way through the Teutonic languages to English, and brought us the more modern meaning of an "exemplar of measure or weight" or "normal uniform size or amount" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What "standards" are we reaching for in the teaching of AP English by virtue of the College Board? What "standards" are we reaching for based on our personal views of what constitutes good and responsible teaching? If we draw a Venn diagram of College Board standards in one circle and our own teacher-standards for teaching senior English in the other, what would comprise the content of the space where the circles overlap, the in-between of College Board standards and teacher-developed standards? Would they overlap? What is the experience of trying to sort through who we are as teachers and who the College Board thinks we are?

Ellsworth (1997) borrows the film and media studies terminology "mode of address," when she poses the basic question: "Who does this film think you are?" (p. 1). She writes:

> [Mode of address is] a provocative and productive tool for those of us who are interested in pedagogy. We can use it to shake up solidified and limiting ways of thinking about and practicing teaching. We can use it to make visible and problematic the ways that all curricula and pedagogies invite their users to take up particular positions within relations of knowledge, power, and desire. (p. 2)

Mode of address, then, becomes a "productive tool" in our teaching. Who do we think we are, as teachers, in teaching AP English in public high school? Who do we think our students are? Who does the College Board think we are, as teacher and as student, separate and together? Tina states, "The College Board doesn't know my kids." We can add to that sentiment that the College Board doesn't know her, either. The College Board doesn't know any of us. Yet, what invitation does the AP English curriculum, as plan and as lived, extend to us and to our students? What invitation does the addition of the exam extend to us? Unraveling the notion of *standard* as an extension beyond our full size, what invitation to stretch do we issue to our classes? Would we still be stretching—reaching for "standards"—without the specter of the AP English exam in the spring? What "conflicting, objective standards of excellence" (Sennett, 2008, p. 9) do we reach for, with and without, the dictates and expectations of the College Board? Does our pedagogical approach to "conflicting, objective standards of excellence" take on more puzzling and powerful meanings when we meet them with our student-apprentices in the AP English classroom-workshop?

Home Workshop

Sennett states, "The workshop is the craftsman's home" (p. 53). He explains the statement's historical background that "in the Middle Ages craftsmen slept, ate, and raised their children in the places where they worked" (p. 53). Fortunately, AP English teachers in public school get to live in our own homes, a-part from school, but our classroom-workshops still become our home-away-from-home, our-second-home, our *querencia*. *Querencia,* a Spanish word for which there is no English equivalent, refers to

> A place where one feels safe, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn, a place where one feels at home. It comes from the verb *querer,* which means to desire, to want…(Heard, p. 4, 1995)

Our classrooms are where our passions meet our desires and our wants, and whether they are yet aware or not, our students' desires and wants. I have come to-know and to-name the AP English classroom as a place of safety, a place of autonomy, a place as comfortable as my own skin, "a place from which [my] strength of character is drawn" (Heard, p. 4, 1995). Are the strength and the power borne, in part, from the workshop sites, where we are living-the-tensions, adapting-to-the-tensions, and surviving-the-tensions: teaching and testing, pushing and pulling, holding on and letting go?

The term *workshop* has a variety of connotations in the teaching of English. We may facilitate writing workshops with our students and their papers to help with brainstorming, peer-editing, and/or revising; we may have in-class poetry workshops to focus on particular poems, poets, or ways of understanding; we may attend College Board and other training workshops throughout our careers to-gather/to-gether with colleagues, hone our craft, and stay current on the latest pedagogical approaches, or changes to the AP English exams. We don't often, however, think of our physical

classrooms as workshops in-and-of-themselves, but in several senses, they are. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes:

> The simple conditions of craft contain a reference to the wearer and the user at the same time. The work is cut to his figure; he "is" there as the work emerges…Thus not only beings which are at hand are encountered in the work but also beings with the kind of being Da-sein for whom what is produced becomes handy in its taking care. Here the world is encountered in which wearers and users live, a world which is at the same time our world. The work taken care of in each case is not only at hand in the domestic world of the workshop, but rather in the *public world*. (p. 66)

What is it like to dwell in the "domestic world" of the workshop-classroom and the "public world" of the standardized test in the teaching of AP English? The compound noun *work-shop* derives from *work*: "Action involving effort or exertion directed to a definite end, esp. as a means of gaining one's livelihood; labour, toil; (one's) regular occupation or employment" and *shop*, "A house or building where goods are made or prepared for sale and sold" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Indeed, the AP classroom is where AP *teachers* gain their livelihood, and earn a paycheck for their labor and toil. But what is the nature of the students' work, both as individual students and in-concert with their AP teachers?

Digging deeper through the dictionary definitions, *work* also refers to, "The labour done in making something, as distinguished from the material used," as in the difference between labor and parts on a bill from the auto mechanic. What constitutes our labor in AP English? What constitutes our parts? Toward what "definite end" are we directing our work, our labor, and our parts? I re-call Amanda's words, "I don't really look at the test as being their ultimate goal. I tell them that it's a goal, but for me, that's not really my goal for them." If our test scores are not our valued end-products, then what "work" do we produce in the work-shop? What craft are we training our student-

apprentices to practice? What "goods" do we make and "sell" in the AP English classroom?

One thing is for certain: we are not selling tests or test scores. A few hours before I arrive at Tina's classroom for our second conversation, one of her students mistakenly thinks he should give her the check for the exam in May. At Tina's school, the business office oversees test registration, and she didn't know that exam fee collection season had begun:

> I feel like I was being paid for the class. They hadn't told me anything, that the money was due, that the date was coming up. So this kid comes up to me today, gives me a check, and says, "Here's for the class." And you just feel kind of cheap. There's a lot more to it than just handing me a check. This is not a service; it's not a business deal. That's what it has become with the College Board, and the scores, and the colleges. It's a business deal. It's all negotiated. It seems like the colleges are in cahoots with the College Board, so it just seems like a whole business cycle. I didn't want to be part of that cheap little cycle. It's education. It's supposed to be about the child.

In handing her a check, Tina's student unwittingly tells Tina that she is providing a service, a test-preparation service. For Tina, the check is a stark reminder of an aspect of her job that troubles, even angers, her. Though traditional workshops were places of commerce that also trained apprentices, as a high school teacher, Tina wants no part of the College Board's "negotiated business deal." She asserts that if she is "in cahoots" with anyone, she is "in cahoots" with her students and what she knows are their best interests as they prepare for college and for life.

Wood Shop

Heidegger's (1993b) example of the "cabinetmaker's apprentice" (p. 379) further illuminates the experience of learning and teaching in the classroom-workshop, without the exchange of money:

> [The apprentice's] learning is not mere practice, to gain facility in the use of tools…If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood—to wood as it enters into man's dwelling with all the hidden riches of its essence. (p. 379)

What is the experience of answering, responding-to, and shaping "different kinds of wood" in the AP English workshop? What slumbering shapes within do we awaken as teachers? What slumbering shapes do we teach our students to awaken? What tools serve as our alarm clocks? From the poem with which I opened Chapter One, Clampitt's "Whippoorwill in the Woods," to Frost's "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening," to all of the literature we study, with or without the word *wood* in the title, we are cabinetmakers with apprentices, master-woodworkers in the AP English classroom-workshop, responding to the literature's "hidden riches of its essence" (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 379) in "wood working" with our students.

Another meaning for *shop* is, "A place where something is produced or elaborated…" (*OED Online*,1989/2008). *Shop* has a specific North American connotation, "A school room equipped for teaching the arts of the workshop," (*OED Online*, 1989/2008) formerly known as "shop class"; better known as "technology education" in today's parlance. Despite my use of Heidegger's cabinetmaker's apprentice as an example, the concept of the AP English classroom as a workshop is not readily analogous to "shop class" or "vo-tech," those classes that teach "trades" ranging from auto body repair to hairdressing to phlebotomy. Yet, the AP English classroom can be understood as a production site, a place where goods are produced or elaborated, where student-apprentices "labor-at" and learn the literary and standardized test-taking "trades" under the tutelage of a master craftsperson, the AP English teacher. Through the purview of literature-study-as-craft, the AP English classroom becomes the master craftsperson's

workshop. What is it like for an AP English teacher to assume the role of master-craftsperson in the classroom-workshop?

To Let-Learn

Heidegger (1993b) explores the teaching experience of the master cabinetmaker in connection with the learning experience of the apprentice:

> Whether or not a cabinetmaker's apprentice, while he is learning, will come to respond to wood and wooden things depends obviously on the presence of some teacher who can teach the apprentice such matters. (p. 379)

Is "the presence of some teacher," the dynamic presence of the AP English teacher in the classroom-workshop? Despite the prodigious talent, concerted effort, and tenacious commitment of many of our students, we still need to "teach." And what is the experience of teaching "such matters" in the workshop? Heidegger (1993b) states: "What teaching calls for is this: to let learn" (p. 380). What is called-for in letting-learn in the AP English classroom? Heidegger (1993b) continues:

> Indeed, the proper teacher lets nothing else be learned than—learning…If the relation between the teachers and the learners is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official. (p. 380)

Heidegger's description of "the proper teacher" situates the AP English teacher in the Zone of Between. With the AP exam hovering throughout the school year, the AP English teacher has the answers in the form of answer keys to old AP tests, and the proverbial red pen to score essays according to College Board rubrics, and may find herself in the ill-fitting guise of know-it-all. Conversant Amanda makes a conscious decision to avoid the know-it-all role, as she gradually conditions students to facilitate meaningful discussions on the course reading:

> I often do student-run discussions where I actually don't say much unless they really start to go off and have a misunderstanding…And at the beginning they always look at me when they're answering, even though I try to make it so they don't see me. But then eventually they just look at each other and they actually engage in conversations.

Amanda stays visible just long enough to become invisible to her students as they grow toward confident and independent literary discussions in class. The master-craftsperson is letting-learn as students take turns facilitating discussions, and class "leadership" as well as lively discussion become a more shared, collaborative, and student-centered experience.

Sennett (2008) offers what he describes as "a more satisfying definition of the workshop" (p. 54) that better addresses the tensions the AP English teachers' experience between letting-learn and knowing-it-all, between master and apprentice, and between teaching and testing: "A productive space in which people deal face-to-face with issues of authority" (p. 54). What authority issues do we face in teaching AP English? The most obvious authority issues in any high school classroom may arise between teenage students and their adult teachers; after all, isn't the hallmark of adolescence a breaking-from the established "norms," rules, and traditions of teachers-at-school and parents-at-home? Not always. The teacher-participants describe their students as "motivated academic types," "the best in the school," and "those who naturally do well at everything"; not one teacher-participant in the study mentioned defiance or discipline issues of any kind. Of course, there may be the occasional missed assignment, late paper, or tardy to class, but overall the authority issues between student and teacher are minimal in the AP English classroom.

The etymology of the authority's root word, *author*, derives from the Latin *augere*, "to make grow, originate, promote, increase" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). As the

authority figure in the AP classroom, do we not encourage our students' growth, originate concepts and ideas, promote critical thinking, and increase awareness? In the original sense of the word *authority*, we wear or in-habit a position of authority, much as an author wears or in-habits his or her original work. Might the more pressing and real authority issues in the AP English classroom-workshop be between teacher and test, test and student, and high school exams and college credits, as determined by the College Board? Max van Manen (1991) reminds us that "Pedagogical authority is the responsibility that the child grants to the adult…[to] ensure the child's well being and growth toward mature self-responsibility" (p. 70).

As we in-habit authoritative stances in the AP English classroom, we still the "authoritative sway" (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 380) in favor of a "pedagogical authority" (van Manen, 1991, p. 70) that also encompasses what Kreisberg (1992) names as "curricular authority" (p. 211). What constitutes "curricular authority" in the AP English classroom? What is it like to embody "curricular authority" in the teaching of AP English? Kreisberg (1992) writes:

> Curricular authority would not reside in a list of facts generated by experts, but in the problems pursued by a community of learners and in the connections made between experience and knowledge…In addition, the authority of expertise is based on a relationship of mutuality among members of a class, in which a teacher respects the voices and experience of her or his students, and the students in turn respect the teacher's. (p. 211)

What problems do we pursue in our classroom communities? What connections do we make? A common activity among the participants is collaborative multiple choice practice, when students gather in small groups to share and defend their responses before the scantrons are officially graded. Katherine describes:

> They argue for their answers. You can hear amazing conversations when four of them think it's one answer, and the other one thinks it's the other answer, and that one person is right. It's nice that it's not always the teacher saying this is the right answer and this is why.

The mutual respect and connection-making that occur in AP English class emerge from Amanda's quest to be invisible during discussions to the lone ranger in a multiple choice group, daring to be different. At the same time, both Amanda and Katherine stress the importance of letting students learn to support their literary interpretations.

Amanda wonders, "how to convey to students that there is such a thing as a wrong answer when it comes to literature" and still maintain "a safe environment for delving into a text." Katherine's running joke with her classes is, "Well, you can't tell me it's about the Civil War," unless their "Civil War interpretation" works for every line of the poem. Amanda recently had a student whose shared misreading of Boswell led the whole class down the path of wrong answers. When Amanda pointed out the "common misreading," the outraged student insisted that his argument was as valid as anyone else's. The other students in the class began to assert their new interpretations with support from the text that they hadn't noticed before. The outraged student proclaimed that he was "sticking to [his] guns on this one," but was able to hear and to learn from the sharing of curricular authority in AP English class.

A Necessary Home

The AP English classroom-as-workshop is the home-site where conflicts inherent in the teaching of AP English can be experienced, lived-through, and reflected-upon. In this sense, the AP English classroom-as-workshop is what Sennett (2008) deems, "a necessary home" (p. 80) for craftsman and apprentice alike:

> And yet [the workshop] is a necessary home. Since there can be no skilled work without standards, it is infinitely preferable that these standards be embodied in a human being than in a lifeless, static code of practice. The craftsman's workshop is one site in which the modern, perhaps unresolvable conflict between autonomy and authority plays out. (p. 80)

What is the experience of the AP teacher-master craftsperson embodying the standards and codes of practice in living, dynamic, ever-evolving ways? Are the standards emerging from authentic teacher-selves, from external sources such as the school system, the state, and the College Board, or from some in-between place? The AP English teacher-participants relish their autonomy as AP teachers, while still complying with the authority of the test. What is it like to be at-once autonomous and compliant? Even though the AP English courses are tied to an exam, the teachers retain the autonomy to pick which literature to teach, how to teach it, and even, at what pace. What is the experience of playing out the "perhaps unresolvable conflict" between teaching and testing, and autonomy and authority? What is it like to adapt, survive, and maybe even flourish by living and loving the literature, being-present with our students, and embodying the profound and sacred tenets of what we value most about teaching, learning, and literature?

The etymology of the noun *conflict* is the Latin *conflictus,* meaning "striking together" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What elements or things do we "strike together" in the teaching of AP English? What comes of our clash or struggle? A striking together can also invoke the image of igniting a spark, or a passion. Sparks start fires; fires burn. As I write in Chapter One, the etymology of *passion* is suffering, from the Latin, *pati.* In the teaching of AP English, our passion for literature, writing, and our students involves struggle and conflict. We may be conflicted about our roles as high school teachers in a high school building teaching a course for which students may earn three to six college

credits. We may be conflicted about teaching to the test or not-teaching to the test. In our necessary home, the classroom-workshop, we dwell with students in the Zone of Between, as we pass-on to students, in "slow craft time," the proper use of the "tools of the trade."

***Currere* in Slow Craft Time**

In Chapter Three, I name lived time as a nonlinear "network of intentionalities" (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 484). What is it like to navigate the network of intentionalities with 30 students at-a-time in the day-to-day teaching of AP English? What is the experience of at-once preparing our students for a linear, three-hour test while tending to the more amorphous "multiplicity of the nows" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 383)—the lived time that is experienced "at each time for everyone as 'now and now and now'" (p. 383)—in the classroom? Unless a student qualifies for special accommodations, the AP test is a timed test. Students, to do well on the AP English exam, need to read, think, and write quickly. The three essays that the students write during the testing period are, by their very nature, first drafts. Although we teach students that "writing is a process," and "writing is re-writing," on the AP English exams, writing is a first draft. Foster (1989) writes: "The written product—the text itself—is the course focus, not the composing process that generates text nor the reading process that re-creates it" (p. 6). What happens to the "composing process" in our race for content coverage and high test scores? In our rush to the finish line— the in-class test practice session, the test itself, or getting from *Beowulf* to *Beloved* in eight short months—do we lose sight of the course we are running; the curriculum we are teaching?

The etymology of word *curriculum* begins with *curricle*, the noun meaning a race-course or "a light two-wheeled carriage" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Derived from the Latin, *currere*, "a race chariot," or the race-course, the term *currere* evolved into an understanding of curriculum as a verb, stretching back to its etymological verb form, *to run*:

> In Latin the word, *currere*, means running the race course—a verb. Mainstream understandings in the field of curriculum have traditionally reduced the word to its noun form, the track. In this context…mainstream educators forget that curriculum is an active process; it is not simply the lesson plan, the district guidebook, *the standardized test*, the goals and milestones, or the textbook. The curriculum…is a holistic life experience, the journey of becoming a self-aware subject capable of shaping his or her life path. (Kincheloe, 1998, pp. 129-130, emphasis added)

What is the nature of the "life path" we are shaping in the teaching of AP English? The curriculum we live and breathe in AP English, what Aoki (2005c) terms the "curriculum-as-plan" and "curriculum-as-lived" (p. 161), is at-once a race to be run, the race-course or track on which our feet pound, as well as a journey to be experienced, reflected upon, and even savored along-the-way. It's a good thing we're "advanced" in advanced placement, as we are called upon to multitask—to be involved in many thoughts, actions, and activities simultaneously. We work with our students in class to read the questions, prompts, and passages rapidly but carefully, to underline and annotate as they go along, and to formulate a thesis or argument in record time. We may distribute poems photocopied in the con-text of test layout—with prompts, arrows, and multiple choice questions, but we also attempt to foster understanding and appreciation through questions and writing, both academic and personal. At the same time, timed test-taking is a skill that needs to be taught, learned, and practiced.

The timed nature of the AP English exams and our responsibility to train our students to work well under timed conditions present a powerful paradox for the master craftspeople in the classroom-workshop:

> Craftsmen take pride most in skills that mature. This is why simple imitation is not a sustaining satisfaction; the skill has to evolve. The slowness of craft time serves as a source of satisfaction; practice beds in, making the skills one's own. Slow craft time also enables the work of reflection and imagination—which the push for quick results cannot. Mature means long; one takes lasting ownership of the skill. (Sennett, 2008, p. 295)

What is the experience of taking pride in "skills that mature" in the AP English classroom? After adhering to the steady rhythms of "slow craft time" during class, what happens to "slow craft time" on AP Fridays and on exam day? All of the participants felt bound by time-constraints, one school year (one semester for Tina); to guide students through a challenging and engaging college-level English course while preparing them for the exam never seems like enough time. The teacher-participants always feel rushed. They have their favorite books, projects, assignments, and approaches. Limiting pure test practice to "AP Fridays" helped a few of the teacher-participants strike a better balance between what they wanted to do, and what they felt they had to do for test preparation. Still, they live in the tension. Amy shares:

> There's just never enough time, and I try to push it. And I feel that I'm actually overworking, not necessarily overworking the kids, but they're not getting as much out of it. So I thought, you know, I'm going to just take it easy this year, and if I don't get everything done, like this semester, then I don't get everything done. Mostly, it's me because I want to get those creative projects in, too. And that's part of the problem because I feel they're important as well. That's what causes the conflict.

Later in this chapter, I write of Katherine's decision to postpone a few days' worth of lesson plans to alleviate her students' frustration in reading and understanding poetry. Katherine honors "slow craft time" over the quick fix when she makes this

change to her schedule. Amy's vow to not always "get everything done," privileges "slow craft time" over "the push for quick results" (Sennett, 2008, p. 295). Sennett (2008) writes, "The patience of the craftsman can thus be defined as: the temporary suspension of the desire for closure" (p. 221). Might the "desire for closure" in the AP English classroom be the desire for high test scores on exam day? If we temporarily suspend our "desire for closure" and our "push for quick results," when do we re-instate that desire? When do we resume the push? Might our desire for a "practice [that] beds in, making the skills one's own," be the desire that our students em-body the living tenets of learning and loving literature in and beyond the AP English classroom, and on and beyond the College Board exam? Are we obligated to suspend the desire for "the practice [that] beds in" as we get closer to exam day? Might we try for a re-conciliation between the desires for closure and for a practice that [beds] in over "craft time"? Finally, what tries our patience as patient teachers in the AP English classroom?

Patience in Slow Craft Time

The saying, "patience is a virtue," can be traced to the Old French, *pacience,* meaning "virtue which enables a person to overcome difficulties," or tolerate "faults or limitations of other people" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). The Latin etymological derivation of *patience* is *patientia* (*OED Online*, 1989/2008), which shares the root word *pati*, to suffer, which is also the root of *passion*. Does our passion give us patience in the teaching of AP English? Palmer (1998) writes: "There is a name for the endurance we must practice until a larger love arrives; it's called suffering" (p. 85).

Patientia also refers to endurance (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Our patience to run-the-race and stay-the-course over our eight months together in AP English, develops

through endurance and stamina—our teacher-stamina, our students' stamina, and the stamina we create and draw-upon together. What is the experience of developing, maintaining, and increasing stamina over the long-haul in the teaching of AP English, and on the life paths we journey, with and without our students? The etymology of *stamina* is the Latin plural of *stamen*, "the warp in the upright loom of the ancients" which became more commonly known as, "the thread spun by the Fates at a person's birth" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008).

Our stamina in AP English is an essential structure through which our literary experiences with our students are woven, and our life's "vital impulse[s]" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008) are threaded-through the tension of teaching in-between art and craft, coverage and *currere*, curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived. To sustain our seemingly divided teaching lives over the long haul, we may turn to the words of Rilke:

> Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves… Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (In Palmer, 1998, p. 86)

As we teach and live our way into "some distant day," Palmer (1998) reminds us: "I may not know how to solve [the tensions], but wrapping my life around them and trying to live out their resolution, I open myself to new possibilities and keep the tensions from tearing me apart" (p. 86). What keeps us whole in the teaching of AP English? What binds the pieces while living the tensions of conflicting demands, desires, and expectations? What tools do we use with ourselves and our students as we "live the questions now"?

Cool Tools

I re-call my eleventh grade English teacher, Mr. Froysland, growing evermore frustrated with us—peering over his reading glasses, gripping the edges of his podium, chewing his flavor-worn Chiclet in double-time through the silence—after he asked about the symbolism of the turtle in Chapter Three of *The Grapes of Wrath*. The turtle-as-struggling-Joad-family seems so obvious to me now, but I have the right tools, and I know how to use them. Over years of experience as a student, and as a teacher, working with the tools of the trade, I have learned to translate figurative language into literal meaning, and express my interpretations to others through writing and speaking. I now provide my students with a set of tools and a set of skills with which to use those tools, in "slow craft time" (Sennett, 2008, p. 295) to better ensure their "lasting ownership" (p. 295).

The etymology of the noun *tool* is derived from the Old Teutonic verb form, to prepare or to make (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What preparations do we make in the teaching of AP English? What preparations are we asking our students to make? In equipping our students with tools, from texts to practice tests to close-reading skills, are we not preparing them to make meaning, from literature, from life, and from the world around them, both present and future? Are we not also preparing them for the reality of what lies ahead, being judged by a number on a single three-hour test?

Applebee (1996) would classify the tools of literary analysis in the AP English classroom as "cultural tools," which invite and enable students to "participate in a variety of socially constituted traditions of meaning-making that are valued in the cultures of which they are a part" (p. 9). Our teaching of AP English is a handing-down of what we

know and love about approaching, understanding, and applying literature to our present work, our future work, and to our lives. But Applebee (1996) warns:

> Any conception of education that strips these tools of their contexts, or focuses on their past rather than on present relevance and future potential, will be debilitating for the individual and for the society as well. (p. 20)

In preparing our students for the College Board, do we run the risk of stripping the cultural tools of their context, relevance, or future potential for usefulness? Do the skills we practice with our students in preparation for a future test and its attendant college credit, debilitate our students, or diminish their future potential? Tina states: "I talk about the possibilities of a passage, but sometimes you feel like you're narrowing it down too much, instead of opening it up." Are we narrowing possibilities instead of expanding options for a life of literature-in-context? Applebee (1996) claims that educational researchers and students "note the discrepancy between grand goals of exploration and discovery, and the ways in which classroom interaction unfolds" (p. 21). Might this "discrepancy" also be named as the Zone of Between in which the teacher-conversants appear to dwell aright? What tools do we use, and teach our students to use, as we approach wholeness and expansion in the AP English classroom?

The Proper Use for Several Tools

In structuring meaning in the dwelling aright in the Zone of Between in AP English, I re-call Gary Snyder's poem, "What Have I Learned." He writes of, "The moments/between hard pleasant tasks," which voice my experience of passing tools and skills to my students in the AP classroom:

> What Have I Learned
>
> What have I learned but
> the proper use for several tools?

> The moments
> between hard pleasant tasks
>
> To sit silent, drink wine,
> and think my own kind
> of dry crusty thoughts.
>
> —the first Calochortus flowers
> and in all the land,
> it's spring
> I point them out:
> the yellow petals, the golden hairs,
> to Gen.
>
> Seeing in silence:
> never the same twice,
> but when you get it right,
> you pass it on
> (Snyder, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 105)

The teacher-participants learned "the proper use of several tools," got it right, and passed it on—and continue to pass it on—to their students in the AP English classroom-workshop (minus the wine, of course). What is the experience of teachers passing-it-on to students in the AP English classroom? What do we see in silence?

Katherine has come-to-know that she is working with her students in "the slowness of craft time" (Sennett, 2008, p. 295), and may not see "in silence" the immediate effects of her teachings:

> I have come to peace with the idea that I'm laying the groundwork, that I think [the students] will have the skills when they are just taking three classes [in college] and they're sitting under a tree on some campus somewhere, and they're reading some book. They might actually have time to say, "Oh, this is really cool," and they'll have the tools to be able to read it.

James also honors the develop-mental stage at which his students arrive in his AP classroom. He worries sometimes that he's giving them literature that, as high school students, they may not be mature enough to grasp in a meaningful way. In giving them

the tools they need to begin to understand literature that may be difficult, he articulates his conundrum by sharing a quotation from a friend: “When you dissect a frog, it’s not a frog anymore”:

> There is a sense that we’re depriving kids of literature. Actually, the thing I get more is I don’t want to give kids something that they’re not ready for. I don’t want them to read something because they have to read it in class and ultimately steal the experience of it. I mean, what register do you have for this when you’re 17 years old, but at the same time, isn’t that literature’s job? To bridge those gaps, to put us in totally different situations and make us see the universals? To relate to it in different ways? So I think, yes, I am afraid of ruining great literature for kids by making it clinical and dissecting the frog and so on.
>
> But most of them are going to college to study marine biology and so on. They’re smart kids, so really what they’re doing is they’re getting exposed to literature that they wouldn’t otherwise. They’re getting good guidance in it. Whatever I lose in overanalyzing something rather than just loving it, I think I gain in the fact that a lot of these kids get the chance to love literature through analyzing it. (James)

Where does James dwell in the tension between loving literature and “overanalyzing” it? Does he risk “steal[ing] the experience” of literature by giving students readings for which they may not be ready? With this question at the forefront of his mind, James distributes the scalpels, cork trays, and frog carcasses, and with sensitivity to who and where his students are, guides them through the proper use of tools for literary frog dissection. He in-habits a let-learn approach with his students in the AP classroom, as he gives “good guidance” to exploring literature to which they may never have been exposed without the AP designation. His worry that he’s stealing the experience of literature is assuaged by his realization that the future marine biologists in the room are receiving literary gifts they may never have unwrapped without his class. Though the conversants’ students may or may not see immediate results in terms of depth of understanding or high test scores (James’ students score high), they have the

experience with the literature and the tools of literary analysis available for their present coursework, their future test-taking, and their future lives as literary adults.

If I Had a Hammer

Heidegger (1953/1996) observes: “What everyday association is initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work” (p. 65). What is our daily work in the AP English classroom? What is the experience of the daily work of dissecting literary frogs with our students? What other habits and rituals, in addition to frog dissection, do we pass-on to our students in the work of the AP English classroom? In our sometimes repetitive skill and drill test practice, in our working both against and with the clock during timed sessions, we not only use the tools of literary analysis, we become the tools themselves. Sennett (2008) quotes Polanyi in offering an example of what Polyani terms, “focal awareness”:

> "When we bring down the hammer we do not feel that its handle has struck our palm but that its head has struck the nail…I have a subsidiary awareness of the feeling in the palm of my hand which is merged into my focal awareness of my driving in the nail"…we have become the thing on which we are working. (p. 174)

What is “the thing” we become in the teaching of AP English? What are our “nail heads” that beckon our “focal awareness”? As I observe students during an in-class timed essay practice, I see hands gripping pens, annotating prompt and passage, writing word-after-word, while heads are bowed, as if in prayer. Students may glance at watches detached from wrists, propped on desks, or crane necks to glance at the clock on the side wall. Does an AP English student become prompt and passage, essay in-progress, or the ticking hands of a clock face during timed test practice? What do I become as I watch them in-action? The timed aspect of test practice intensifies our concentration, gets our hearts beating, makes us race against the clock, the other students, and ourselves. Even

though I am not actually taking the practice test myself, do I feel what the students feel as I watch over their swift essay writing? As I pace up and down the aisles or around the U of desks, do I become at-once all 28 sets of heads, hands, pens, and papers? Am I composing my grocery list for dinner? Or, am I focused on the student who may be watching the clock longer than others, or the one whose pen against paper sends sparks flying? What happens to "slow craft time" as we replicate test-day conditions in our classrooms? What work do we become on Monday, when AP Friday is over and we're back to the "slow craft time" of making meaning from the poetry of John Donne?

As "we are always bodily in the world" (Van Manen, 2003, p. 103), so are we bodily present on AP Fridays, as well as AP Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005) writes:

> Experience discloses beneath objective space, in which the body eventually finds its place, a primitive spatiality of which experience is merely the outer covering and which merges with the body's very being. To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world, as we have seen; our body is not primarily in space, it is of it. (p. 171)

In the teaching of AP English, what is the "certain world" to which we are tied? Are we tied by a secure square knot or by a less permanent slip knot? What space are we "of" rather than "in"? As we pass-on to our students the proper use of several tools, are we teaching them only to use the hammer? Are we inhabiting a "let-learn" stance as we "let" the students "learn" to-be not only the hammer, but also the nail head? AP teachers work-through a process that may be understood as one of "corporeal anticipation" (Sennett, 2008, p. 175) in our lesson planning and in our classrooms with our students. In-knowing the bodily experience of engaging in literary analysis ourselves, do we take-on our students' mental struggle to express in writing a new understanding of Hamlet's line, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!"? Do we feel our students' hearts racing in

our own chests as they work against the clock deciphering an unfamiliar passage? As students of literature and writing ourselves, both in the past and in the present, have we come-to-know what comes-next in the process of being and doing AP English? Do our bodies anticipate, in corporeal anticipation, what we need to let our students learn to-be prepared and engaged? What is our experience of being both the hammer and the nail head in the teaching of AP English? What is our experience of letting our students learn to be-come both hammer and nail head? Heidegger (1996) writes:

> Hammering does not just have a knowledge of the useful character of a hammer; rather, it has appropriated this useful thing in the most adequate way possible. When we take care of things, we are subordinate to the in-order-to constitutive for the actual useful thing in our association with it. The less we stare at the thing called hammer, the more actively we use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, a useful thing. (pp. 64-5)

When we catch ourselves staring at "things"—students, practice exams, test scores—do we use our hammers to "take care of things"? Our "useful thing" in the teaching of AP English, our hammer, be-comes what we use it for, what Heidegger (1996) terms its "what-for" (p. 65) or "its usability in the usability which essentially belongs to it" (p. 65). The essential elements of our hammers are the metaphorical tools of the trade that we began to acquire in the Home Depot of our youths, and learned to use in the family homes and classroom-homes of our childhoods.

Building *Bildung*

Sennett writes, "A person's *Bildung*—his or her early training and social indoctrination—prepares the ground for self-motivated, sustained activity through adulthood" (2008, p. 264). In-conversation with teacher-participants and in-reading their journals, many stories emerged. These stories are narratives that explain and sustain the teaching life, from its earliest roots:

> Max Weber called the sustaining narrative a "vocation." Weber's German word for a vocation, *Beruf*, contains two resonances: the gradual accumulation of knowledge and skills and the ever-stronger conviction that one was meant to do this particular thing in one's life. (Sennett, 2008, p. 263)

Lisa introduced herself to me in our first conversation as "a walking cliché." After avoiding teaching as a young adult, she found herself "lost" while working jobs in which she was not invested. When she came-to teaching, she felt she was doing the thing she was meant to do in her life, her *Beruf* or vocation. The etymology of *vocation* is the Latin noun of action, "to call or summon," originally by God to guide a person to religious work based on his or her "natural tendency to, or fitness for, such work" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Huebner (1999b) writes: "A vocation is not simply being called forth; it is also being called by" (p. 380). Who or what calls Lisa to teaching?

Lisa's use of the AP English course term *cliché* to name herself stems from this definition of cliché: "A timeworn expression which has lost its vitality and to some extent its original meaning. The use of clichés generally reveals a failure of the imagination" (Beckson & Ganz, 1960/1990, p. 42). English teachers often write "avoid clichés" on students' papers. Yet in answering the call-to-teach and having it suit her as no previous endeavor had in the adult world of work, Lisa reflects, "I'm in the right place, I'm doing what I want to do, it was like this big light bulb." The "big light bulb" illuminates neither loss of vitality nor failure of the imagination, but the dazzling passions of a committed, caring, and creative teacher with roots traced back to her childhood. Lisa reveals, "I was the kid in elementary school who wrote stories in her spiral notebook and read them to her friends at recess."

Amanda, too, set out on a non-teaching path by going to business school, but can pinpoint early interests and proclivities that foretell her future teaching home.

> My mother had always told me that I would make a good teacher, saying that I have "a way of explaining things to people." I had always felt flattered by that, and I had entertained the idea from time to time, but by the end of high school I had decided I was going to go for the big bucks, and to me that meant business school.

Amanda also expresses similar contentment in her vocation: "I feel like I'm teaching something, and I'm doing something that I'm good at, which is, of course, what everybody wants to be able to do." Amanda tells this story to illustrate how early steps to the blackboard were the first steps to her teaching career:

> I realized my affinity for English in the eighth grade. I remember my teacher, Mrs. Mazis, saying one day, "Now, who wants to come up to the board and diagram this sentence for everyone?" I had to sit on my hands to suppress the urge to volunteer myself. I wanted to show my teacher and my class that I could diagram the hell out of that sentence. *Jim was the man who painted our house*. "Come on people!" I thought. "Someone else raise your hand!" Well, no one else did raise their hand, so I nonchalantly got up from my seat in the front row and showcased my knowledge of participles and antecedents. I tried to look as uneager and indifferent as possible, but on the inside I was truly enthused. The only explanation for this was that I secretly loved grammar.

Amanda's secret love affair with grammar became her not-so-secret passion as it has in part, after a brief detour in business school, become her life's work. Returning to the etymological root of passion as *pati,* to suffer, Amanda re-calls having to quash her enthusiasm for diagramming sentences—to suffer in silence—literally sitting on her hands to keep from raising them. As a self-conscious eighth grader who wanted to fit in, she found herself trying to fit onto lines as rigid and unforgiving as the ones used to diagram sentences. Ironically, a business school class re-ignited her passion for literature and writing. Amanda re-calls discussing a Flannery O'Connor short story in Ethics class, remembering how much she loved and missed studying literature, and leaving business school to major in English shortly thereafter. Though she went to business school to

prepare for a financially lucrative career, she never looks back and declares, “I don’t want to sit at a desk and keep the gold by myself all day.”

Most of us prepared for our vocations as children in teachers’ classrooms, but James also names books as his formative, significant mentors:

> I can point to maybe one or two books that I read and really enjoyed that were ones that I had to read for class. Most of the books that made me who I am as an English teacher were books I read solely on my own, I didn’t have them taught to me. But I taught myself because I loved them.

Though James’ autodidacticism was probably more pronounced, we all took what we learned in school, particularly in English class, and made it our own. In owning what we read and so readily understood, we wanted to share with others what James calls our “very deep knowledge base,” well before we became teachers, or were even aware that we wanted to become teachers. Early on, we felt compelled to share our experience of reading, loving, and living literature.

We also expressed varying degrees of success in sharing our interests with others, before we were teachers and had classrooms of our own. Akin to the eighth grade Amanda, sitting on her hands, bursting to diagram on the board, I remember trying to “teach” my well-read mother how to “read” Howard Roark’s eight page courtroom speech at the end of Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead*, as my eleventh grade English teacher, Mr. Froysland, taught me to “read” it. It was the first school book that I dared to write in, as I underlined page after page in blue ink, and wrote comments in the margin. (Though it was school property, I never returned it, and still have it.) I went line-by-line with my mom, reading aloud and interpreting. After several patient minutes, my mother said, “I don’t have to read it for school,” and that was the end of my lecture on individualism versus altruism based on my first lengthy close reading. Her reaction was

an early indication that perhaps my enthusiasm for certain works of literature was not always going to meet with universal appeal.

Katherine recalls having a similar experience with her AP students, while sharing a definitive experience she had with John Donne's poem, "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning":

> It was one of the first poems that was taught to me in a way that made the poem change. And then when I reread it with the AP class, I was like, "This is so cool," and of course they didn't agree, and I said, "This poem's so cool to me, let me tell you want happened when I read it the first time," and I don't think it resonated for them.

But it may have resonated with at least one or even a few students, or it may resonate later, in college or beyond, when the students least expect it, and when they are more ready for the demands and insights of conceits and metaphysical poetry.

As we seek to share our lifetime of literary passions with others, we may find ourselves using our "cool tools" to build scaffolding, "the temporary framework…to provide accommodation for workmen and their materials during the erection…of a building" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008), rather than the actual building itself. What is the experience of constructing scaffolds in the AP English classroom? Applebee (1996) defines the notion of pedagogic scaffolding:

> Scaffolding…can be used to analyze all of the paraphernalia of instruction, from one-on-one discussion to textbook readings to whole-class and individual activities. All of these embody socially valued ways of knowing and doing that students will eventually internalize. (p. 114)

Applebee (1996) further reminds us that when we are "providing support for students' participation" in the form of scaffolding, our teacher-role "changes from one of judging how well a student has performed to helping the student perform better" (p. 114). In helping our students to improve, we recognize their passions and possibilities, and

fashion the supports and framework they require as their needs come to our attention. In tending to our students' needs, we find ourselves referring back to those pivotal people and experiences that shaped us into the teachers we are today.

Our Axe Handles, Our-Selves

Gary Snyder's poem "Axe Handles" begins with a father teaching his son, Kai, to throw a hatchet into a tree stump. Kai asks his father for a hatchet of his own. The father has an extra hatchet-head, but it needs a handle. The father then shows Kai how to turn an old axe handle into a suitable handle for the hatchet-head. The father is the speaker in this poem:

> There I begin to shape the old handle
> With the hatchet, and the phrase
> First learned from Ezra Pound
> Rings in my ears!
> "When making an axe handle
> the pattern is not far off."
> And I say this to Kai
> "Look: We'll shape the handle
> Of the axe we cut with—"
> And he sees. And I hear it again:
> It's in Lu Ji's Wen Fu, fourth century
> A.D. "Essay on Literature"—in the
> Preface: "In making the handle
> Of an axe
> By cutting wood with an axe
> The model is indeed near at hand." (Snyder, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 27)

The teacher-participants in my study may range in age from 25 to 46, yet we all have our models, our axes, "near at hand." In our AP English classrooms, we allude to our antecedents—our significant teachers and pivotal works of literature that came before us, and shaped us—as we set-about our work with our students. Snyder's poem ends:

> My teacher Shih-hsiang Chen
> Translated that and taught it years ago
> And I see: Pound was an axe,

> Chen was an axe, I am an axe
> And my son a handle, soon
> To be shaping again, model
> And tool, craft of culture,
> How we go on. (Snyder, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 27)

What comprise "model and tool" in the AP English classroom? What "craft of culture" are we imparting, inviting our students to be-come a-part of? What is the experience of how-we-go-on in the AP English classroom? As teacher-participants, we range in age from young adult to advanced (placement) middle age, yet we are our students' axes, and they are the handles-in-progress. No matter what profession our students choose as adults, or what profession chooses them, they too, will be axes someday, serving as models for the younger and/or less experienced people in their lives. They will be "soon/to be shaping again, model/And tool" (Snyder, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 27). To have com-passion is literally "to suffer together with" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). The onus is on-us in the AP English classroom, to shape the axe handles who sit before us with care, concern, and com-passion, so they may "go on" to careful, concerned, and com-passionate shaping of their own.

My Axes

I re-call my four high school English teachers, my axes whose care, concern and com-passion varied. I wouldn't name one of them as my favorite; there would be others after who would earn, then keep, the most-favored teacher status, but these teachers were significant in my development as a student of literature, as a writer, and ultimately, as a high school English teacher. In their classes I was always curious, never bored. Even though I swore I'd never be a teacher, I credit these teachers with my life's work.

I adored my first high school English teacher the way I loved a favorite camp counselor or older girl cousin. I wanted to be her. Rumor had it that Mrs. Mikulak was the former Miss Ohio, or at the very least, first runner-up. She could have been a contender, but instead the 1970s found her teaching ninth grade English at East Grand Rapids High School. Tall, leggy, and lean, she was a sophisticated twenty-something in designer shoes, sporting a stylish haircut with shimmering highlights. She was "Mrs." because she was divorced—again, rumor had it—from a professional baseball player, and she had no children of her own. Every day I looked forward to her tailored camelhair slacks, her elegant designer shoes, her cashmere sweater, her gold earrings and bracelets, her beautifully long manicured fingers cradling the white Warriner's grammar book. Everything about her was perky, prepared, and in place. She always seemed so happy to be with us. I had Mrs. Mikulak for two years in a row, English 9 and 10. We read *A Separate Peace*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Great Expectations*. She taught *Great Expectations* as a mystery and posted whodunit-type questions on the bulletin board, and I read ahead to find the real identities of Magwitch and Pip; Estella and Miss Havisham. I loved those books; I learned those books. Yes, I was already an avid reader and eager student. I read *Jane Eyre* in two snow-days-at-home during a Michigan blizzard, I was also writing short stories and poems outside of class, but she validated my love of literature, of learning, of writing, and of talking about books. Unlike French or geometry, everything in English class made perfect sense to me the first time. Mrs. Mikulak taught me how to read between and beneath the lines, and I couldn't wait to share what I'd learned with anyone who would listen, or read my writing.

Mr. Froysland was our junior English teacher from New Hampshire. We all loved Mr. Froysland, even the football players. He began the poetry unit by asking who our favorite poet was; I raised my hand and answered, “Joni Mitchell.” He took my response seriously—I was serious—and asked me why I considered her a poet. I don’t remember what I said, probably something about paving paradise and putting up a parking lot, but he respected my answer. He read Robert Frost aloud as I imagined Frost would have sounded, “Good fences make good neighbors.” Neigh-buhs. I still hear his voice when I read poems that I first met with him. The anguished husband to his grieving wife in Frost’s “Home Burial,” “Don’t—don’t go./Don’t carry it to someone else this time” (Frost, 1979, p. 53). In my teaching, in my marriage, I still hear Mr. Froysland’s voice, as crisp and clear as the “stem end and blossom end” of those “ten thousand thousand fruit” in “After Apple-Picking” (Frost, 1979, pp. 68-9).

We even read women writers: Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Bless him. He liked Edna St. Vincent Millay, and I liked that she had lived the bohemian life in Greenwich Village, and I vowed to follow in her footsteps.

We read Great American Novels: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Fountainhead*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. With Mr. Froysland, I fell in love with John Steinbeck and a whole canon of American Literature. I weathered Mr. Froysland’s disappointment in me, and frustration with the class, when he decided it was time for us to “get it” on our own, and we just didn’t, or couldn’t. We didn’t yet have the tools to do what he did with literature. He didn’t get angry. He chewed his single peppermint Chiclet, adjusted his reading glasses, tucked in his shirt, cleared his throat, gripped the podium, and told us what he wished we had picked up on ourselves: the symbolism of the turtle in Chapter Three or

the image of the green light on the dock or any number of elusive vagaries of the American Dream that were beyond us sixteen year olds, leaving us in the literary dust bowl of high school English.

In twelfth grade, I had Mrs. Brown, the traditional, stereotypical English teacher. Diminutive, old, and puckered, she was as wiry as her little granny glasses over which she would peer, just to make sure we were still there. Above her peach pit of chin, was a sphincter of a mouth, through which I can still hear her enunciate place names from Shakespeare: Tewksbury and Shrewsbury. She was to a person, what a raisin was to a grape: tiny, dry, and shriveled. She abandoned us at semester to teach at a nearby college; it was probably the real teaching job she had waited a long lifetime for, and in her place came a classmate's mom-as-substitute-teacher.

I end my re-collections with the man who told me that without his class, I'd never write again. I had Mr. Brenner for creative writing. From what I could tell, the only preparation he did for class was fill his thermos with milky coffee, and chug an extra swig of Mylanta as we walked in. He told us stories from his life; he had a younger wife and young children. He was living an old writer guy's *la vida loca*. He gave us writing assignments, had us type our final drafts at home on master dittos, then left class to run copies, and would return and distribute the pages for our class workshops. We took long, deep whiffs of fresh purple ink before beginning our writerly critiques of one another's work. Mr. Brenner also introduced me to the great American playwrights: Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Edward Albee. If we weren't writing or workshopping, we'd take parts and read plays aloud: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Glass Menagerie, Long*

Day's Journey Into Night, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* I played Elizabeth Taylor.

Mr. Brenner was rotund and hearty, with thick graying hair and a long, heavy grey and black striped beard that he stroked while he pontificated. He called me Fraulein Boren-schveig with a feigned German accent. He took great pleasure in ridiculing my writing, while praising the Hemingway-Kerouac aping boys. Still, he entered my work in contests and I won awards and made him look good, so it wasn't all bad. He took me and several classmates to Interlochen Arts Academy to give a reading, and to nearby colleges for conferences and seminars. I remember one on New Journalism, and we got to read excerpts from *The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test* right there in our small, conservative, Midwestern town. Judith Guest had just published her first novel, *Ordinary People*, set in a town much like ours, and she met with a small group of us during lunch. Mr. Brenner was my introduction to life as a writer. Little could we know at the time, but among us were a successful Hollywood screenwriter, a famous award-winning poet, and me, a high school English teacher.

When I dropped Mr. Brenner's creative writing class my senior year to take creative writing at the community college—my version of advanced placement—he told me that I would never write another word again. At the time, I thought him an arrogant "male chauvinist pig," but his curse would take hold. I earned an incomplete in my first college class, as I couldn't seem to write anything "good enough" to finish and hand in. My dropping Mr. Brenner's class marked the beginning of an era of a dysfunctional, crippling relationship with the written word that had always come so easily to me as a child and younger adolescent. My coming-of-age would meet its demons in college,

demons that would take years of struggle to exorcise. Coming-to-know writing, like teaching, as a craft to be learned, practiced, mastered, and re-mastered, finally broke the insidious spell cast by the macho-swaggering, Mylanta-swigging, Mr. Brenner. In coming-to-craft, in coming-to an understanding of writing as craft, teaching as craft, and teaching AP Lit as craft, that's how I went on; that's how I continue to go on.

How We Go On

The teacher-participants also name their antecedents, those who came before and with whom they experienced com-passion, a suffering "together with" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Meeting our mentors, our axes, may not have been love at first sight or love over the long haul, but many of our past axes still guide us today. Amanda's middle school love of grammar and diagramming sentences met its match when she registered for AP Lit as a high school senior. She relates this story of having the dreaded and feared Mrs. E. as her AP Lit teacher:

> For the first time in my schooling, I knew I had a good teacher—one who cared if I improved and one who knew how to inspire me to do it. By the end of the year, I was writing A paper after A paper, and I got a 5 on my AP English exam. That was the first time I recognized that there is a difference between being a hard teacher and being a *good* hard teacher. I felt lucky that I had had the opportunity to learn that difference. I toyed with the idea that I could be a teacher like Mrs. E. I knew I loved English, and I knew that I would love to make a difference for students like Mrs. E had made for me.

It was Mrs. E's voice that Amanda heard in her head at the Carroll School of Management at Boston College when she decided to transfer to Arts and Sciences and major in English, then follow her heart to the Master of Secondary Education Program. After teaching her first year of AP Lit, Amanda wanted to honor her axe, her model who remains near-at-hand:

> I didn't really feel like I had ever shown her that I even remembered her, so I just wrote her a little email telling her that I had just finished my first year teaching AP and how much she had influenced me in my thinking, and the fact that I became a teacher because of her.

Unbeknownst to Amanda until well after the event, Amanda heard from a colleague that Mrs. E read Amanda's letter aloud at her retirement party. Shortly after, Amanda received this email from Mrs. E:

> I have not been able to respond until now because, because you have touched me so. I am "graduating" this year, and my only sadness has been wondering if I'm leaving my beloved profession in good hands. You have humbled me with your letter. I'm grateful. I'm thrilled. I'm relieved. Teaching is safe in your hands. Your letter dispelled the last obstacle to my leaving. You have no way of knowing, but before the use of email I called my wonderful former professor, Dr. David Hutchins, to tell him that I'd become a teacher because of him. After a lengthy conversation, that dear man had a catch in his voice when he thanked me and said he'd been wrestling with the decision of whether or not to retire at the end of that school year. I'd made his decision for him because he could turn over teaching to someone like me. With great respect for you and for him, I give you the same honor that he gave me. Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. David Hutchins begat Mrs. E begat Amanda begat the axe-handles-in-progress who sit before Amanda in her AP classroom now. And we re-call the other connections: Mr. A to Lisa; Mrs. Mikulak and Mr. Froysland to me. We are a-part of who and where we came from, our teachers and their classrooms, which also became our classroom-workshops for a brief period of time. We only need look at the students seated before us to see "how we go on," and where we are going, to-gather/to-gether, as axes, as "model and tool, craft of culture":

> And I see: Pound was an axe,
> Chen was an axe, I am an axe
> And my son a handle, soon
> To be shaping again, model
> And tool, craft of culture,
> How we go on.

As we pass on the "craft of culture" tradition of literary analysis to our students, we "provide possibilities…for diverse conversation among people that carries the culture on in time" (Greene, 1995, p. 182). We begin conversations in the AP English classroom by "enabl[ing] students to enter into the needed languages responsibly and reflectively so they can name themselves and their worlds" (p. 183). In our earliest days together, we give them the vocabulary to begin building our "storehouse of common wisdom" (Sudol, 2008, n.p.) to initiate the naming of self and world in and beyond the AP English classroom.

Coming to (Course) Terms

One of the first assignments that we give to our students in AP English is to define 90 to 100 course terms. My list has 90 terms divided into six sections: Narrative/Dramatic Structure, Point of View/Perspective, Characterization, Language, Devices, and General Terms (a catch-all for words such as *bildungsroman* and surrealism). Though it is most effective to learn the terms in context throughout the year, it is helpful for students to review terms they may have understood but forgotten, familiarize themselves with new terms, and categorize terms by use and function. It is also handy to have a list of definitions to which to refer as we travel our literary highways throughout the school year in AP English class.

As I began the work of thematizing the contents of the phenomenological text, transcripts of my conversations with the teacher-participants and our journal entries, I recalled this introductory assignment in AP Lit. Few assignments are as clear-cut, straightforward, and concrete in AP Lit as defining 90 course terms. Still, my students complain. There are too many words to define, they protest, and it smacks of

"busywork." Though students may not make the connection right away, learning the language—the terms—of literary analysis is related to the craft of literature study and AP English test preparation. Heidegger (1993b) writes, "Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork, any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns" (p. 379). Our "business concerns," test preparation, registration, administration, and scores, are not the main reasons for learning the language of literary analysis. Busywork for any reason, students remind me at every turn, is certainly beneath them in AP Lit. What is the experience of teaching students to "come to terms" by defining, memorizing, and applying course terms in the AP English classroom?

From the start of the year, the students need to come to terms with coming to terms; they have to look up and define their course terms, and sometimes I will ask them to do something that may seem like busywork, but through use, they come-to know that the words are related to the craft at hand. The phrase "to come to terms" is "to agree upon conditions; come to an agreement about something to be done," while "to come to terms with" is "to reconcile oneself to, to become reconciled with" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Just as the students must come to terms with doing assignments they may view as tedious and time-consuming, so must their teachers come to terms with, or reconcile themselves to, aspects of teaching AP English that they may find limiting, frustrating, or not quite what they bargained for. T.S. Eliot writes in "Burnt Norton": "Human kind/cannot bear very much reality" (p. 14). What is our reality in the teaching of AP English? What of this reality can we not bear? Parini responds to Eliot's lines: "Everyone must come to

terms with the limits of life, and with its possibilities as well, those ‘hints and guesses’ that point to one end, which is always present: the Eternal Now” (p. 163).

I write in Chapter Two that an aspect of teaching AP English is the experience of making things present, living and loving the literature with students daily in ways that enliven and engage us in the present moment. I bring forth in Chapter Three what Heidegger (1953/1996) names more accurately, the “multiplicity of the nows” (p. 383) or the lived time that is experienced “at each time for everyone as ‘now and now and now’” (p. 383). What is the experience of coming-to-terms in the teaching of AP English in the multiplicity of the Eternal Now[s]? Semester after semester, term after term, we churn students through the mill of introductory literary analysis, and prepare them for the AP English exam in the spring. With our mindfulness for our own and our students’ limits and possibilities, we provide hints and en-courage guesses, but also distribute vocabulary lists. Ellsworth (1997) writes:

> Possibility becomes a thing that can and will eventually be named and pursued. Such pedagogies address me, as teacher, as someone who is to teach ‘for possibility,’ or to name, through assisting students in discovering their authentic voices, what is possible for them so they can pursue it. (p. 172)

What is the experience of teaching “for possibility” in the AP English classroom? What terms do we come-to in bearing the realities of our teaching lives: large classes, conflicting external pressures, our own standards, the College Board exams? Our “hints and guesses” in AP English, certainly the language of a test-connected pedagogy, begin with the most basic of course terms—i.e., metaphor and metonymy—so we might pursue what is possible for and with our students. Although we may not start on the same page of literature and life as our students, by giving them a list of terms, we come-to a shared

language in our classroom community, in discrete and authentic voices, in our journey through AP English.

Paradox in Paradise

Unlike the AP teachers I observed and conversed with in my initial explorations in Chapters One through Three—Mr. C, Ms. M, and Ms. L—the participants in my current phenomenological study, with the exception of Tina, seemed from the outset to be strong, unquestioning supporters of the College Board's AP English exams. Their response to reading the main phenomenological question in my Invitation to Participate (see Appendix C), **What it is like to teach Advanced Placement English in public school while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?**, was some version of Katherine's response: "I don't really feel the tension." Participant after participant told me how much they loved teaching AP English, how motivated their students were, and how fulfilled they felt as teachers because of their work in AP. There were no complaints. I became concerned that maybe I was a-lone in my experience of feeling conflicted about preparing students for the AP exam, while providing them with a rich and invigorating college-level course in literature and composition. Had my colleagues at other schools worked out the tensions when I wasn't looking? Was I imagining or creating a struggle where none existed? Had I invited the wrong group of teacher-participants? Did I need to go back to the proverbial drawing board?

I soon realized that my doubts stemmed from neither my participants nor from my phenomenological question, but rather from my new role as phenomenological researcher, and the nascent relationships that were burgeoning with colleagues who were not just colleagues, but teacher-conversants in my first-ever research study. I was a

newbie. With my clear realization, and in the spirit of paradox, I wrapped tighter to open wide the mantle of hermeneutic phenomenology to both accept/challenge and comfort/dis-comfort, the known and un-known qualities of lived experience that would emerge in my two rounds of conversations with the six participants, and their subsequent reflective journal entries.

As a literary term, a paradox is "a statement which, though it appears self-contradictory, contains a basis of truth that reconciles the seeming opposites" (Beckson & Ganz, 1960/1993, p. 190). The root word *dox* derives from the ancient Greek word for *opinion,* while the prefix *para* "is analogous or parallel to, but separate from or going beyond, what is denoted by the root word" (*OED Online,* 1989/2008). By using a paradox, we go beyond the expected opinion, and challenge previously held notions to illuminate certain truths. Palmer (1998) writes of paradox in education:

> Paradoxical thinking requires that we embrace a view of the world in which opposites are joined, so that we can see the world clearly and see it whole. Such a view is characterized by neither flinty-eyed realism nor dewy-eyed romanticism but rather by a creative synthesis of the two….When we think things together, we reclaim the life force in the world, in our students, in ourselves. (p. 66)

Using another AP English course term, *synthesis,* Palmer urges us not to separate, but to think-together, the apparent disparate forces in our teaching. Again, we are reminded to dwell aright in the Zone of Between. What life force do we reclaim? Our conversations and subsequent in-sights reveal "a view of the world in which opposites are joined" (Palmer, 1998, p. 66). In my work as a phenomenologist, the more I conversed with the teacher-participants and read their journal entries, the more things became—in the words of Alice, after a few adventures in Wonderland, "Curiouser and curiouser!" (Carroll, 1960, p. 35). The teachers were supportive of the test, could enumerate its

merits, but tensions emerged. I was reminded of the Dorothy Parker quotation on James' blackboard: "The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity." With an incurable burning fever for more adventures, I continued my meaning-making endeavors in the Wonder-land that is the teaching of AP English in public high school.

A Really Good Test: Hyperbole or Oxymoron?

A specific type of paradox, the oxymoron, from the Greek "*oxymoros,* 'pointedly foolish,'" consists of "two apparently contradictory terms that express a startling paradox" (1960/1993, p. 188). Does proclaiming the AP exam "a really good test" qualify as an oxymoron? Are we "pointedly foolish" or merely duped by the College Board? Can a standardized test be "good"? Hyperbole is "a figure of speech in which emphasis is achieved by deliberate exaggeration" (Beckson & Ganz, 1960/1993, p. 115). Did the teacher-participants have an exaggerated sense of the test's quality? I was surprised at the unmitigated support of the AP English exams that I heard from the teacher-participants during our first round of conversations, and sought to learn where the all the good feelings were coming from. After all, the AP exam is a standardized test, constructed by an outside corporate entity, and is used as a measure for both students and their teachers. Although no one was so hyperbolic as to proclaim the AP English exam as the best test ever, the endorsements bordered on oxymoronic as they ranged from "really good test" to "really important test." If the exam is a good test, what good is it? And for whom?

I stopped by Starbucks on my way to meet Katherine at her brand new high school in the outer suburbs, where she teaches the school's first graduating class. As I handed her a latte, foam bubbled through the hole in the white plastic lid, Katherine

introduced herself as not my ideal candidate, and she bubbled effusive support of the AP exam:

> I've been thinking about your question about being caught in the tension between teaching and testing, and I don't know that I feel that tension with AP as much as I do with other classes. There is that pressure for the AP test, but the AP test, I believe, is a really good test, so I don't really feel the tension as much because I'm teaching to a test that I believe is actually a very good assessment of their skills. So when I'm teaching to the test, I'm teaching really the same things I would be teaching anyway.

What "same things" does Katherine teach anyway? Would she still be giving timed multiple choice practice tests and in-class essays were she not preparing students for the single, high-stakes AP exam? As a former college English professor who still teaches English literature at the university level in the summer, Katherine knows what she would and would not teach in an introductory college English course, and what pedagogical approaches she would use. She believes in the test as a provider of guidelines for skills she needs to teach her students, and as a fair and reliable measure of her students' abilities. The other participants, though they do not have Katherine's university experience, echoed her sentiments.

At our first meeting, James also shares his hesitation in being part of a study where we may have disagreement about the place of the test in our teaching. He tells me:

> When you mentioned the focus of the study, I immediately thought to myself, I'm going to seem like a hypocrite because I'm one of the teachers who has railed for years about too much testing, we're teaching to the test. Do you remember the MSPAP? That used to drive the living daylights out of me. I was so annoyed at that test. And I just felt for years that we're being put in a position where we have to teach to the test. But oddly, I don't feel that way about AP. I feel that the test is a good measure, and, in fact, I kind of, in a way, welcome the AP exam. I find myself saying in class, this is the kind of thing you'll be required to do on the AP exam…a well-drawn test can make the difference in a teacher's attitude about teaching and teaching towards it.

James' less-than-stellar memories of preparing his eighth grade students for the MSPAP (Maryland School Performance Assessment Program) in the 1990's and early 2000's, has him disclaiming—"in fact, I kind of, in a way"—yet welcoming the AP exam. Terming it a "good measure," James joins Katherine and the other participants in their support of the College Board exam. But later in the conversation, James, true to his moniker as Mr. Disclaimer, adds: "the AP test is not as bad as most standardized tests, but I think as tests go, it's a pretty good one." In keeping with Katherine's comparison that she doesn't feel the tension "as much" with AP as she does with her other classes, James qualifies his initial support of the AP that it's a "good measure," "well-drawn," and "not as bad" as other high-stakes exams.

Amanda's welcome of the AP exam is even more enthusiastic, unequivocal, and unqualified. She relies on the test to support her teaching, and she applauds the test for the structure it gives to her class, the motivation it provides for her students, and the equal opportunity it offers for students to receive public kudos for a job well done, despite the quality of their schools or classroom instruction:

> The class would be too amorphous without [the exam] because I like having a set goal for [the students]. It's hard sometimes to justify sitting around and talking about literature to kids who may not be that interested in it. And while I hate to pull that AP exam card, sometimes it helps to motivate kids. But I also think that the skills tested on the AP exam are really important, and it's admirable for a student to do well on that exam still. Despite whatever expectations there might be in any given school, the test remains the same. I think to have kids aspiring to what they recognize as really, really hard also helps the kids to see that the course is not just whatever they can do. There's actually a national standard for what we're supposed to be teaching, and what they're supposed to learn. So it helps me to justify what I'm doing.

Amanda actually uttered the words "national standard" to me, and appears to seek "justification" for discussing literature with high school seniors in English class. Why did

she feel the need for the College Board to shape her class, set goals for her students, and "justify" her work with literature? A capable, savvy, and smart teacher, why couldn't she do that herself? Perhaps it was our generational gap, a political disconnect, or a mere difference in opinion, but no matter, nothing else in Amanda's speech, writing, or classroom, indicated anything other than pedagogical passion, commitment, and a love of sharing her favorite literature with her students every day. She didn't *need* the College Board or the AP exam; she just didn't mind having its presence in her teaching life, and as a new teacher, she really has not known any other pedagogy in working with highly motivated, capable juniors and seniors.

Amanda uses *standard* in its etymological sense, *estendere*, to extend and stretch (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Like a yoga instructor, she provides students with the tools and the thoughts to move and stretch their bodies beyond where they had been before walking through the doors of her classroom. Like James, she embraces the obvious benefits of the exam with open arms, while embracing the other realms she could explore with her students that are not related to the test. She explains:

> I don't really look at the test as being [the students'] ultimate goal. I tell them that that it is *a* goal, but that's not really my goal for them. So I look at the goal of the class as having them be well-read, well-spoken, and ready for college.

Where does the test reside in Amanda's teaching when it becomes *a* goal, rather than *the* goal? Where does she keep the "AP exam card" when she's not playing it? Does she consciously marginalize the test while preparing the students to be "well-read, well-spoken, and ready for college"? Are there separate locales in her teaching mind and stance for test and not-test? As with several other teachers in the study, straightforward test preparation in Amanda's classes—multiple choice practice tests and timed in-class

essays—was relegated to a widely-observed tradition known as "AP Fridays." The teachers and students alike looked forward to the weekly change of pace, and perhaps a short break from the primary unit of study. AP Fridays were an early indication to me that the testing culture was perhaps not as invasive and insidious as I had imagined, that along with wearing jeans and school tee-shirts, AP Friday had taken its rightful place as a relaxed, almost pre-Sabbath weekly ritual.

As I write in the beginning of this chapter, the etymological root of *ritual* derives from *sacred*, meaning to set a-part as holy (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). In setting a-part pure test preparation in the form of AP Fridays, are Amanda and her colleagues at-once marginalizing and honoring the demands of the test? By separating test preparation from the rest of the week, the rest of the unit currently being studied, and the rest of the pedagogy, the teachers are marginalizing AP Fridays. By giving test preparation its own designated day, are they also honoring the holy rite of multiple choice practice and in-class timed essays? Are Amanda and her like-minded colleagues dwelling aright in the Zone of Between, as they accommodate the AP exam and its trappings, as well as the need for less test-centered pedagogical concerns?

Paradox-redux

Tina is the only participant who acknowledges her tension between teaching and testing from our earliest conversations. She initially dubs the AP exam "a good test," but qualifies her response:

> For the most part, I think [the AP exam] is a fair assessment, but my students really struggle with trying to get all of their thoughts down in an organized way in the forty minutes that they have to do it in. But in terms of the skills that they're learning, I think to be able to pull out details from a text, from a passage, and to be able to put them into an organized fashion or write a thesis, I think those are the skills they can use in any class when

> they go to college. So I do think it's valuable for them. And to look at all of the literary devices, to analyze them, and to be able to elaborate under time conditions is valuable. It's not everything, but it's valuable.

Finding value on the test for her students and honoring her students' "struggle," while acknowledging that "it's not everything," illuminates Tina's sensitivity to the tension between teaching and testing. Tina's students do not have the option of taking AP Lang in their junior year, and tend to come to her with a lower-skill level than the students of the other teachers in the study. Getting her students "up to speed" takes time that the other teachers in the study may spend on more challenging, sophisticated activities from the beginning of the school year. Tina explains, "I can't ask the students to do more in-depth analysis in their writing when they don't know how to integrate a quotation."

Tina estimates that she spends about half of her teaching time in test-related endeavors: "In a class period, we do 50% of something that could go directly toward the test in terms of learning a literary term or writing with the skill that the test would require." She gives an example from earlier that day: "We analyzed a soliloquy in *Hamlet*, and I asked them to find the devices that support the tone. That's very similar to something they would do on the AP test. We also did some performance, though, and that would not come into the AP test." After a brief pause, she adds, "But it all kind of works toward [the AP test]."

Performance of Shakespeare, and other creative, from-page-to-stage activities engage students and add to their understanding of the literature. Still, Tina gives students ample test preparation time:

> Every other week we do multiple choice practice. And I don't like that, and I wouldn't do that at all [without the test]. I would do fewer timed writings, but I still think there's some value to timed writings. I think most of the skills that we're doing in AP Lit do correspond to the test in some way, but not directly.

Ever-cognizant of what she deems "the struggle"—to increase of the number of students taking the exam, to improve exam scores, and "to bring the bottom level up" while "keeping the upper level up there," Tina confesses:

> I'm kind of lost on how to approach it, to actually improve the scores and then how much do I gear the class to the test? I don't want to do that. That goes against my joy of teaching the class.

At-once at-peace and in-struggle with the test, Tina is "practicing paradox" (Palmer, 1998, p. 79) in the AP English classroom. Does what goes against Tina's joy of teaching, also benefit her students? In Tina's biweekly multiple choice practices and occasional timed in-class essays, she observes frustrated students, those who may have stopped reading longer assigned texts that were too difficult, or stick with the shorter passages on the test practice drills. She explains:

> The passages [on the test] are difficult to read, too. I think so many times now that kids don't try to tackle the harder passages [in assigned texts]. They just give up. Having the harder passages [on the test] and forcing them into it helps increase their intellect and their skills. It's valuable for them.

But where Tina sees value, she also acknowledges struggle, both her students' and her own, and admits feeling "lost" on how to re-solve the tension she experiences in teaching AP English. The "struggle" that Tina names also points to the practice of passion. Returning to passion's etymological root, *pati,* to suffer, Tina's sharing of her passion for literature and writing, at-times through the expectations of the College Board, calls on her com-passion in working and suffering together with her students. They are in-struggle together. Of all the participants in the study, Tina's students might benefit

most from increased focus on test preparation, but fortunately, the drive to increase course enrollment, exam participation, and test scores is situated in her classroom, at this point in time. The governing entities of her school system have yet to be bitten by the AP bug, and any improvement she makes to the AP program is her own endeavor for the love of the challenge and in the name of doing what's right for her students.

At this writing, she "flies under the radar," and has almost complete independence in building the program at her school. The College Board exam is part of the reality of teaching AP English; that is not going to change anytime soon. Tina has the autonomy to teach with, not against, her joy, while providing her students with the skills and confidence they need for college, for life, and for the test. It's a path whose course she is free to chart on her own terms; she is at-once the Lewis, Clark, and Sacajawea of this expedition, and she uses her ingenuity, experience, and knowledge of her students to determine where and how they will explore the unknown territory of the in-between.

Tina's lived experience of teaching AP English—both AP Lang and AP Lit—is the experience of dwelling aright in the Zone of Between. Looking at her "classroom practice through the lens of paradox" (Palmer, 1997, p. 67), Tina's experience with AP test practice situates her between teaching and testing, and between opening possibilities and narrowing options:

> There are passages [from the test] that really aren't that important, and so you try to find the possibilities of a passage, but you narrow it down too much instead of opening it up… Sometimes when the kids read a passage, if they don't understand it, they'll just tell you what they do understand, and they won't take the time to really delve into it, to figure out the stuff that they don't understand. The AP tests make them really look at what they don't understand and pursue it.

> We had [a passage] today, it was part of a Thoreau passage, and it had some philosophy. And when you get something like that, you're able to actually go over the factual answers and then you can talk about it a little bit more, about what they think. And some kids wanted to read more Thoreau, so that was really good. But there's one like, "Time was, a sober Englishman," and they don't care. That is hard to go anywhere with. Makes us all want to roll our eyes as soon as we say it. (Tina)

Is the collective eye roll in response to Pope's "Time was, a sober Englishman" offset by the newly tapped interest in Thoreau, or the ability to gain entry into a difficult work of literature by identifying antecedents? Palmer (1998) writes:

> We will not be able to teach in the power of the paradox until we are willing to suffer the tension of opposites, until we understand that such suffering is neither to be avoided nor merely to be survived but must be actively embraced for the way it expands our own hearts. (p. 54)

What do we embrace in the teaching of AP English? What, or whom, do we exclude from our group hug and leave alone in the cold? The etymological root of *embrace* is the French *bras,* arms *(OED Online*, 1989/2008). Add the prefix *-em,* "to put into," and we ask: What do we hold in our arms in the teaching of AP English? What, or whom, do we carry?

An obsolete definition of *embrace* is literally "to put a shield on the arm" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). From what or whom do we shield ourselves? Are we protecting ourselves, our students, or both? As we create spaces for literary, academic, and personal growth in the AP English classroom, do we also expand our hearts, as well as our reach, providing our students' safe passage from childhood to adulthood? Children's maturation rates vary widely, and in the AP English classroom, we carry a diverse array of readiness to make the transition from high school to college; from childhood to adulthood. By definition, the Advanced Placement program accelerates growth to the college-level while still in high school. As we attempt to dwell aright in "the power of the paradox,"

we come to terms with our continued attempts to gather our students in the compassionate group hug, to suffer together, the tensions of being in-between: teaching and testing, high school and college, childhood and adulthood.

Coming of Age in the AP English Workshop

> What is a child? To see a child is
> To see possibility, someone in
> The process of becoming. (van Manen, 1991, p. 1)

At the special occasion gatherings of my extended family while I was growing up, we always had a separate children's table. The card table, usually set up in the living room, with a clear view of the dining room table of adults, was a matter of necessity. It wasn't that the children weren't welcome at the dining room table, there just wasn't room for all of us. We children sat around the card table on a mélange of folding chairs and other "seating," ottomans and step stools, culled from around the house. The children's table was as much a part of those early family traditions as the cut crystal bowls of Spanish peanuts and the relish tray of pickles and olives. From an early age, as amused as I was by my brother's and cousins' concocted "cocktails" of every liquid and condiment on the table plus mashed potatoes, I was even more intrigued by the conversation in the dining room. I eavesdropped, and longed for the day when I, too, could join the conversation, or at least have a real chair from which I could hear better.

Joining the adult conversation, once it happened, was a non-event. I can't even remember making the transition from the card table to the dining room table, but the transition—like a *bat mitzah* or a *quinceanera*—is a time-honored rite of passage, deeply steeped in cultural traditions. A coming of age ceremony, with or without the big party,

marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. But as the *bar mitzvah* haiku goes:

> Today I am a
> man. Tomorrow I return
> to the seventh grade. (Bader, 1999, p. 75)

The *bar mitzvah* boy speaking in the haiku is in an in-between place. He is no more a man today, at his *bar mitzvah* ceremony, than he will be on Monday, when he returns to middle school. Under Jewish law, he is permitted to read from the *Torah*, and is expected to observe the commandments as an adult, but a seventh grader is still very much a child, hardly one to covet his neighbor's wife. High school juniors and seniors are much closer to adulthood than their seventh grade counterparts, but remain adolescents, especially in school, even if they take AP classes. Sudol (2008) writes:

> Some [AP] teachers try to propel students' growth by piling on extra work—more readings, more homework, more papers, more direct instruction, more grading. Ironically, these techniques actually make the AP course more like high school and less like college…I would like to suggest that a better way to equate the high school AP course to its college counterpart is to help students think and work independently and thereby make best use of the storehouse of common wisdom they are rapidly accumulating. (n.p.)

Stocking the "storehouse of common wisdom" eases the transition from the card table to the dining room table; from children's mashed potato "cocktails" to adult dinner conversation. Huebner (1999a) writes: "It is in conversation that the newness of each participant can come forth and the unconditioned can be revealed in new forms of gesture and language" (p. 112). What newness comes forth in the teaching of AP English? What new forms and gestures are revealed? Greenblatt (2008) writes:

> The best teachers invite students to accompany us on a demanding journey, and then we help them to prepare and travel with us…An invitation is inclusive: we want them to join us (and generations before and after us) in a conversation about and exploration of literature. And if they don't know yet how to accept our invitation, then we need to show them how. It's not, however, always so easy to join the conversation. (n.p.)

As the conversations about literature have been going on for centuries, our students are latecomers (Greenblatt, 2008, n.p.). We do not so much bring them "up to speed," as we issue invitations to join the broadcast, already in progress. We, along with our students, "learn to take part in the traditions that encompasses the knowledge of the larger culture, and remake them as our own" (Applebee, 1996, p. 5). The process of remaking is also the process of becoming, in and beyond the AP English classroom.

Joining the Conversation

"Every once in awhile," Amy shares, "I have an original idea." The central literary device at work: understatement, with a hint of irony. Amy is full of good ideas. I become acquainted with the details of her creative energy through our extended conversations and her journal entries, but I feel its power upon entering her classroom for the first time. Amy's classroom walls are altars to what she and her students love about literature and learning. Galleries abound displaying student-work devoted to The Olympians, *Lord of the Rings*, comic strips, and favorite writers. Both realistic and fantastical portraits, maps, posters, and cartoons adorn the bulletin boards, and most every available wall surface. Icons of popular culture, including a large stuffed Sponge Bob, reside on shelves and in storage cubbies. An unsuspecting visitor might mistake Amy's classroom for the art room, or the child development center. It's a glorious, playful place to be. On my first visit, the student-run Music Club is also meeting there,

playing and commenting on a variety of contemporary songs; our initial conversation begins with background music, until Amy asks to them to please move elsewhere.

What led to Amy's understatement, was my immediate "Wow" reaction when she describes the upcoming field trip she is taking with AP Lang, based on, of all things, an exam question. Free-Response Question 1 from the 2007 AP English Language and Composition Exam reads (College Board AP Central, 2007):

> **Introduction:** Museums are collections of artifacts. Although museums can represent interests from fine arts to whaling, people who visit museums sometimes fail to realize that every exhibit, every display case, represents a series of human decisions: some individual or group of individuals has to decide to include a particular piece of art or specific artifact in the museum's collection.
>
> **Assignment:** Read the following sources (including the introductory information) carefully. **Then write an essay in which you develop a position on the most important considerations facing the person responsible for securing a new work of art or an artifact for a museum. Synthesize at least three of the sources for support.**

Among the six sources provided for students to use as textual support in their essay writing is an excerpt from the website of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC. The excerpt, "About the National Museum of the American Indian," is a brief introduction to NMAI's history, holdings, facilities, and exhibits. When Amy decided to give the students the essay as an in-class timed practice writing on an upcoming AP Friday, she began preparations with a charter bus reservation and permission slips. She explains:

> I gave them a copy of the essay question before they went to the museum and told them to find out as much information for the essay as possible. I encouraged them to take pictures of exhibits, speak to the curators, and explore surrounding museums as well. Then, when they wrote the essay that Friday, they could use any information they acquired from the trip as one of their sources. The students really enjoyed the trip and felt it lent a practical, real world aspect to the essay. It was no longer just a question on a piece paper that they had to answer for a test. It came alive and relevant.

What is the experience of coming "alive and relevant" in the teaching of AP English? *Relevant* derives from the Latin *relevare,* "to raise up" (OED Online, 1989/2008). As Amy raises the question from the page and gives it life for her students at the museum, she later discovers that the essays the students wrote earned higher scores than previous attempts on similar synthesis essays. Scores also rise. Heidegger (1953/1996) states: "To be relevant means to let something be together with something else" (p. 78). What "something" is "together with something else" in the essay-inspired field trip?

Amy's students (something) become entwined with the essay question (something else) as well as with the museum staff and exhibition (something else). Amy's relevant activity also "raises up" children to the adult world of museum curatorship. Amy's written reflection on her innovative approach to exam practice led her to articulate these goals: "to produce students who are able to think on their own, students who can formulate their own opinions on issues and effectively argue their point of view. I want them to be able to *join the conversation* and become more involved in the world around them."

Advancing Toward Historical Horizons

In en-abling her students' initial forays into the adult world of museum curatorship and significant decision-making, Amy is opening wide their view of the horizon. As I discuss in Chapter One, Gadamer's (1960/2002) notion that, "A horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further" (p. 245) illuminates aspects of our work in AP English. We "advance further" in Advanced Placement English not only by preparing our students to earn college credits

through examination, but also by offering opportunities for them, as teenagers, to participate in the adult world, both in and beyond the classroom. By putting themselves in the curators' shoes, Amy's students are "rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only [their] own particularity but also that of the other" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 305). In this field trip activity, "the other" for the students, is the adult museum staff.

Amy, by organizing an experiential venture based on an essay question, teaches her students an-other method of close reading analysis, meaning making, and oral and written expression. The students "transpose" (p. 305) themselves to the mindset of the museum staff in key moments of decision making when creating new exhibits. In transposing themselves, the students do more than empathize, they acquire a "historical horizon" (p. 305):

> It requires a special effort to acquire a historical horizon. We are always affected, in hope and fear, by what is nearest to us, and hence we approach the testimony of the past under its influence. Thus it is constantly necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning. Only then can we listen to tradition in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard. (p. 305)

What do we hear when tradition calls to us? What meaning do we make? What past could young AP students possibly have that would inspire "hope and fear"? To what "expectations of meaning" might they "overhastily" assimilate? By approaching the essay question as presented by the College Board, a prompt and a series of reproduced documents on paper, the students might revert to what they know to be "appropriate" responses and techniques: annotating the text, developing a thesis, supporting an argument with ample evidence, and writing a five-paragraph essay in 45 minutes on an AP Friday. Applebee (1996) writes:

> Traditions can transform the individual, providing powerful tools for understanding experience; individuals also transform traditions, through the ways in which they make use of and move beyond tools they inherit; and to ensure that this continues to occur, our traditions of teaching and learning must be transformed so that students learn to enter into the ongoing conversations that incorporate our past and shape our future. (p. 3)

Amy's innovation transforms test practice into experiential, meaningful, and relevant experiences for her students. Amy's peripatetic disposition, and her love of sports and travel, naturally lend themselves to her interpretation of essay-question-as-field-trip. Also fitting is that the proper noun *Peripatetic* refers to the "teaching methods of Aristotle, who conducted discussions while walking about the Lyceum of ancient Athens" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1992, p. 1347). The word stirs images of Amy walking the Mall of Washington, DC, conducting discussions with students about decisions curators make when acquiring artifacts for the Smithsonian museums. The College Board did not mandate, or even suggest, that Amy take her students on a field trip in preparation for the 2007 synthesis essay question, but the question and the diverse array of sources engaged Amy's innovative pedagogical stance, and spurred her into action, and onto the bus.

Risky Business

The obsolete definition of *engage* is to pledge, or "to expose to risk" *(OED Online*, 1989/2008). Its 18th century French etymology stems from *engager*, to invite *(OED Online*, 1989/2008). Though originally used in matters of finance and property, Amy's engagement as a teacher expresses her commitment, or pledge, to her students and her pedagogy, while inviting them to join her in what becomes a collaborative journey to join real-world, adult-world conversations about what to include in museum exhibitions. Greenblatt (2008) writes: "The best teachers invite students to accompany us on a

demanding journey, and then we help them prepare and to travel with us" (n.p.). There is an element of risk in any journey, particularly when one is traveling with adolescents.

What does Amy "risk" through her pedagogical approach of raising question from page, students from desks, children to adults? Are her supervisors or colleagues pointing and whispering behind her back, perhaps accusing her of wasting "precious" time? After all, it's at least an hour to the Smithsonian and back, and students clamor for lunch in the café and a visit to the gift shop. Is she a frivolous time-waster who puts her need for excitement and breaks from the sometimes mundane dailiness of classroom teaching ahead of her students' soaring standardized test scores? Hardly. Huebner (1999b) posits: "We have no choice but to risk ourselves" (p. 385). The risk involved is not covered by signed permission slips, but rather, is the risk connected to putting oneself "out there," going-with students from classroom to real-world, daring to-be her peripatetic self, and encouraging students to journey to adulthood by joining conversations that were once restricted to adults. Van Manen (1991) writes:

> Children seem often caught in their desire to venture out, court danger, and engage in daring behavior, while at the same time they seek to free themselves of risk and uncertainty. Even as adults we seem to be consciously engaged in the struggle between our desire to exercise our freedom by taking risks and our desire to enjoy security by reducing risk. (p. 57)

Our adolescent AP students straddle childhood and adulthood, high school and college, and learning and test-taking. In our struggles between desire and uncertainty, freedom and security, staying-in and wandering-out, we see Amy is dwelling aright—with her students—in the Zone of Between. She is tapping her students' "desire to venture out" while providing a safe home from which to venture. With ample preparation in the classroom, and clear guidance to talk to people who work in the museums about

their decision-making process, the students venture to bring their classroom learning and their test practice to bear on real-world matters that matter.

To risk is a verb, meaning to venture upon, to take chances of, and to venture to bring *into* some situation (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What does Amy risk by taking students downtown to the museum rather than keeping them safe at their home-school? What situation does she venture to bring them into? The struggle between our desire to exercise freedom and our desire to sit safely behind our desks, with a clear view of our students seated safely behind their desks, is the risk of coming-of-age, of growing up and joining real-world, adult-world conversations about things that matter.

What's the Matter?

In taking her students and the practice question to the museum, Amy facilitates their entrance into "ongoing conversations about things that matter" (Applebee, 1996, p. 3). What's "the matter" in the teaching of AP English? A double-reading of the previous question asks both "what's wrong?" and "what is the substance?" Perhaps what is "wrong" in the teaching of AP English surfaces when we try to determine who decides what matters, and what content comprises our teaching. The employees of the College Board constructed the essay question that prompted Amy to plan the field trip to the museum. Did the role of question-designer privilege the College Board to determine that it was important for students to consider the decisions museum curators make in planning exhibitions? Does entering a conversation with museum curators encourage students to participate in "conversations that are themselves embedded within larger traditions of discourse that we have come to value?" (Applebee, 1996, p. 3). Who defines the "larger traditions of discourse" and who determines their "value"? If it is the College Board, then

who does the College Board think we are, as teachers? Who does the College Board think our students are? Who does Amy think her students are?

An etymological reading of the noun *matter* re-turns us to the Latin *material,* meaning wood or building material, as well as the "subject of discourse or consideration" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What are Amy's students building when they board the field trip bus to the Smithsonian, AP Lang practice prompts and pens in-hand? We re-call Heidegger's cabinetmaker's apprentice mentioned earlier in this chapter: "If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond to all the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within the wood…" (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 379). In adding "conversations about things that matter" to the list of six sources that the College Board provides on the 2007 Free Response Question, is Amy in-habiting the let-learn stance with her students, while providing them with a variety of wood to which they will respond?

Though calling an AP exam essay prompt a "free-response question" may seem a misnomer, in learning to synthesize information from several sources, including conversing with curators and other museum personnel, the students exercise the freedom to make several of their own decisions, while determining what decisions the curators made in choosing artifacts for new exhibitions. The students enter conversations that represent "traditions of knowledge-in-action, deeply contextualized ways of participating in the world of the present" (Applebee, 1996, p. 2). Amy's innovative approach to test practice facilitates opportunities for students to make-new "the rather static traditions of knowledge-out-of context" (p. 5), where knowledge is stripped of "meaning and vitality" (p. 3).

Innovate and De-liberate

The Latin derivation of the verb *to innovate* is "to make new" or "alter" *(OED Online*, 1989/2008). What is the experience of "making new" and "altering" in and beyond the AP English classroom? Amy uses a released AP exam question-as-written for her students' practice, but re-news and alters it by taking her students to the museum for their data collection, detail selection, and writerly reflection. She provides a de-liberate, freeing opportunity for students to live-the-question, rather than merely read-it, (d-read it), and write-it. Greene (1995) writes:

> The significance of encounters with the arts for classrooms [is that] the young are moved to imagine, to extend, and to renew. Surely, nothing can be more important than finding the source of learning, not in extrinsic demand, but in human freedom. (p. 132)

Amy brings her students to find "the source of learning" (Greene, 1995, p. 132) by bringing them to the museum, by letting them loose, and by encouraging them to "join the conversation" by talking to curators, taking photographs, and recording original observations of "the important considerations" that the essay question requires. She transforms her traditional obligation as an AP Lang teacher to prepare students for the AP Lang test to new obligations relying on her ingenuity, peripatetic energy, and knowledge of her students. In bringing her students to the museum for an authentic encounter with the arts, is Amy exercising her own human freedom as teacher, as well as her students? In liberating the question from the page, and the students from the confines of the classroom, is she also embodying an esoteric etymological meaning of the noun *innovation,* from Scottish Law, "the alteration of an obligation; the substitution of a new obligation for the old" *(OED Online*, 1989/2008)? Her new obligation, re-newed through

innovation, frees students to think for themselves and engages them more fully in the adult world.

At the end of the day, however, the students board the bus for the trip back to high school, back to the classroom, and back to their essay question practice. The College Board prompt requires that they "synthesize at least three of the sources for support" in writing an essay that "develop[s] a position on the most important considerations facing the person responsible for securing a new work of art or an artifact for a museum." The process of essay writing post-field trip becomes a more an exercise in synthesizing both written documents and personal experience, than what we have come to know as "test practice." Gadamer (1975/2002) writes:

> This imaginative productivity is not richest where it is merely free, however, as in the convolutions of the arabesque, but rather in a field of play where the understanding's desire for unity does not so much confine it as suggest incitements to play. (p. 46)

"The desire for unity" is at the heart of synthesizing written, verbal, and visual text, as well as personal experience, for a cohesive, coherent arabesque of an essay. What may have been yet another timed in-class writing exercise on an AP Friday becomes a site of "imaginative productivity" that liberates rather than confines, and instigates play among the variety of sources and experiences.

Innovate and Instigate

Although Amy was the only teacher in the study who took the essay-question-as-field-trip approach, innovations abound in the classroom of the teacher-participants. An obsolete definition of *innovation* is also "a political revolution; a rebellion or insurrection" *(OED Online*, 1989/2008). Here is Katherine's innovative approach to what was certain to become an all-out class insurrection, if she didn't proceed with care:

> I had this awful day…and I have this revolt in my class, and basically I was ignoring it all until I heard the line, "Well, you haven't even taught us how to read this poetry," and I was livid. I was livid because I've had most of these kids for two years, and I know that they know how to read it…So I actually came up with a three-day activity that threw off our entire schedule, but it was a very effective way to convince them that, yes, indeed, they did know how to read it.

Katherine's innovative response to her class' near-innovation (in its obsolete meaning as insurrection), was to postpone three days of carefully-laid lesson plans, revert to "slow craft time," and design a more relevant and immediate course of action. That night she brainstormed the steps that she takes when reading difficult poetry, then she phoned her English teacher friends and asked them to add to her list of steps.

She wrote the steps on an overhead, but did not show it to her students at the beginning of class the next day. Instead she arranged the students in groups, gave them a poem, had them read it individually and then together. She had them write down the questions they were asking each other as they were deciphering the meaning of the poem:

> I had the groups talk, and we brainstormed on the board all the things that they went through. And I said, "Okay, let me show you my list," and I think I had one or two things that they didn't come up with. I said, "You know how to do this." That's when I talked about how you have to read a poem three or four times.

Katherine continued the lesson by giving students poems written in both verse and prose forms, and prose pieces written in prose and verse. The students needed to determine which form was most effective, and which form was the author's original. In the readings and discussions that ensued, the students tapped into skills that they already possessed, recognized their strengths, all the while building both their confidence in tackling difficult poetry and, hopefully, their passion for literature.

Gadamer (1975/2002) writes: "The essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (p. 299). When Katherine's students question her

teaching through the challenge, “Well, you haven’t even taught us how to read this poetry,” they call-into-question her efficacy as a teacher. Katherine’s first response, anger—“I was livid”—gives way to “pedagogical tact” as she responds to her students’ frustration with practical action. Van Manen (1991) defines “pedagogical tact” as “pedagogical understanding in being attentive to young people, through what we notice about them, in the way we listen to them” (p. 123). In reflecting on her own reading and interpretation process, she responds to students’ questions and frustrations by calling into question her own pedagogical stance and dipping into her “good teacher” reserves. Van Manen (1991) writes:

> A good teacher often demonstrates a way of questioning, of thinking through problems, of being animated by an interest that has to do with the way this teacher has come to embody the subject matter in his or her style. (pp. 121-22)

Student frustration and incipient insurrection and resistance give way to deeper understanding and sense of community—*sensus communis* (Gadamer, 1975/2002, p. 19) or “the sense we have in common” (van Manen, 2003, p. 142)—as Katherine re-calls and shares her process of reading and meaning-making, and those of her colleagues, with her frustrated students. Gadamer (1975/2002) asserts: “To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled” (p. 363). When the students question Katherine, they “bring into the open” the mysterious knots of poetic language, and begin to untangle meaning and explore literary possibilities.

Ellsworth (1997) also reminds us that “Resistance is often seen as what students do after they’ve *already* achieved understanding” (p. 48). Even though Katherine “taught” the students how to read and interpret difficult poetry, they insist that they never

learned how, and challenge her teaching. Ellsworth (1997) illuminates the nature of dialogue between teacher and student, and between student and text (p. 48):

> When someone invites me into dialogue, they invite me into a particular practice that also exists in relation to, and is implicated in, those histories, interests, and ignore-ances. And those who initiate dialogue, no matter how "nonpartisan" or "open-minded" to their intentions, cannot escape placing themselves in relation to me, to others, to history. (p. 49)

Katherine initiates the dialogue between students and particular poems in the AP Lit classroom. Of what is Katherine "ignore-ant" in her early dealings with the student uprising? What does Katherine "ignore" in her initial responses to her students' not getting it? What invitations does she issue that students may accept under duress, or flat out reject?

Ellsworth (1997) also invokes "mode of address" (p. 1) to explore further the notion of dialogue in the classroom: "Who dialogue's address thinks I am…is never exactly who I've been or who I'm wanting to be, willing to be, able to be" (p. 49). Are we over-emphasizing the *advanced* component of Advanced Placement, expecting students to be somewhere or someone they are not-yet willing or able to be? Katherine, after her initial anger, is open to hearing her students' concerns, and addressing them in a manner that transforms their mutual disappointment into practical action She invites them to reflect on what they know, and to apply what they can do with what they know. Aoki (2005a) calls for this mutual, critical reflection between teacher and students:

> Mutual reflection allows new questions to emerge, which, in turn, leads to more reflection. In the ongoing process, which is dialectical, and transformative of social reality, both teacher and students become participants in open dialogue. (p. 131)

What new questions emerge in the teaching of AP English? When students tell Katherine: "Well, you haven't even taught us how to read this poetry," they are

questioning her teaching, the poetry interpretation process, and their place in the "social reality" of the AP English classroom. The "open dialogue" that ensues, which includes Katherine's introspection and her tapping into her colleagues' reading experience, prepares her to meet her students where they are in a more precise and helpful location. Sizer (1985) asserts:

> A teacher should try to start where the student is…Stretch a student, but not so much that he will repeatedly fail. If he can see that he is getting somewhere, he will accept your challenges…One learns something in order to learn more. (pp. 112-113)

What do the AP English students learn "in order to learn more"? What does Katherine learn "in order to learn more"? Katherine's innovative response to her students' concerns and near-insurrection cultivates a community of reflection, respect, and renewal in hearing her students' concerns and frustrations, meeting them where they are, and taking them as far as they can as go**.**

Innovate and Cultivate

In its botanical connotation, *innovation* refers to "the formation of a new shoot at the apex of a stem or branch," especially at the place where "the older parts [are] dying off behind" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). We AP English teachers are not dropping dead at the moment, but our students are the new shoots who grow from our innovative pedagogical approaches. Katherine's gentle, yet firm and clear, guidance in re-viewing how to approach unfamiliar poetry, cultivates confident new shoots among her students who would no longer wither at the sight of challenging literature.

To cultivate means "to promote the growth of, to devote oneself to the *advancement* of development of…" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008, emphasis added). As we promote our students' growth in the arts and crafts of literary analysis, self-expression,

and standardized test taking, we meet them where they are, and devote ourselves to their *advancement* to the next place: the testing site, college, adulthood. Several of us remember years back to when we were the burgeoning new shoots in someone else's classroom. Lisa's participation in this study brought to mind an essay that she wrote for admission to her master's in education program, after being in the work force for several years as a magazine writer, and then as a children's theater director and acting coach. She begins a journal entry for this study with an excerpt from her application essay:

> In the beginning of my high school years, I lacked the confidence in myself to perform to my full potential. As a teenager, that lack of confidence plagued every aspect of my life until I ended up in the classroom of a very special teacher. This teacher was the first person to convince me that I was smart, and that my talents would take me wherever I wanted to go in life.

This particular teacher, we'll call him Mr. A, instilled in Lisa a love of learning and a belief in self that carried her through college, graduate school, and her own teaching. Under his tutelage, she grew into a strong and confident young actress, writer, director, and scholar. Her newfound confidence translated to finding passions wherever she went as a college student and young adult, and helped her to pursue her interests in drama, creative writing, and literature. What she found in Mr. A's encouraging pedagogical style, she looked for and found in other instructors in college and graduate school:

> I went to college and fully explored the lessons he taught me. I spent a semester abroad, furthering my intellectual curiosity and was blessed to have many teachers with the same passion for learning and teaching as my high school teacher had. Upon my return, I was no longer satisfied with ordinary means of learning. I had discovered the power of learning in an open environment through creative means. I had witnessed the notable difference that comes from being taught by someone who actually cares and I was in awe. In awe of everything I had learned, and in awe of my own personal growth.

Lisa's articulation of "no longer [being] satisfied with ordinary means of learning" and "the power of learning in an open environment" laid the first building blocks of a personal teaching philosophy. She recalls after performing a skit in Mr. A's class, he suggested, "You should audition for the play." He sensed her interest in theater beyond the words on the page, saw her talent in an informal class skit, but it was his public en-courage-ment that gave her the courage to take the important leap to the stage she would never have taken in high school without his specific personal support.

Courage and En-courage-ment

The etymological root of *courage* is Latin *coraticum,* or heart. An obsolete definition of *courage* is "the heart as the seat of feeling " and "what is in one's mind of thoughts, what one is thinking of or intending; intention, purpose, desire or inclination" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Mr. A, in-knowing his students and in-caring for them, gave them the gift of what he knew to be in their hearts; he uncovered and tapped into their desires. In short, Mr. A's teaching en-courages students to "speak" their desires, which may have been unconscious or repressed (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 60-61):

> Repression, then, doesn't mean that some illicit desire or knowledge has been stuffed away, somewhere deeper inside ourselves, where it exists unchanged but forgotten. Repression means that some indestructible, illicit knowledge of our desire has been changed into something symbolically unrecognizable to our conscious selves. (Ellsworth, 1997, pp. 60-61)

Mr. A recognizes desire in his students, and replaces what may be "symbolically unrecognizable…with other—usually more acceptable—symbols or signifiers" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 61). What does it mean to teach for desire in the AP English classroom? What is it like to help students change the unrecognizable into more acceptable symbols and signifiers? Though Mr. A was a social studies teacher, his teacherly ways still serve Lisa well as an English teacher.

Lisa recalls an opportunity she had to put Mr. A's lessons into practice with Ellen, a student she had in her first year of teaching AP Lit:

> We were doing *Jane Eyre* and we talked in class about how Jane had this inherent self-worth, and how it was one of the things that I always admired about her. Ellen comes to me after class and she was a genius. Varsity softball player, so smart, great grades, scholarships, you name it, and she asked if she could meet with me, and we made an appointment. When she came in, she said: "You know in class how you were talking about Jane, how she had this, like, inherent self-worth? I was just wondering, how do you get that?"
>
> But for me, and I explained this to her, it was about trying it on. Not like this ridiculous self-affirmation stuff, but it was about making it fit you, it was about finding what you were good at and what made you feel good about yourself and focusing on those things, rather than on the other things, and just learning to develop that…I think Mr. A was the catalyst for all of that in my life, and that's part of why I kind of came full circle back to teaching, and back to being here, that idea of confidence was something that I really wanted to give them.

Lisa's advice to Ellen that earning As does not necessarily translate to "inherent self-worth," and that learning is about finding what you're good at as well as what makes you feel good about yourself gives insight into Lisa's teaching "for possibility" and desire (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 172). Rather than equip her already straight-A, high-flying, high-scoring student for another academic success as defined by standardized test scores, Lisa tends to her student's more pressing emotional needs while preparing her for the road ahead, equipping her with tools to endure and to thrive.

Confidence and passion go hand-in-hand in Lisa's teaching of AP Lit. What is the experience of building confidence, desire, and courage through literature-based activities in AP English class? Doll (2000) states: "One way to slow down, reflect, and feed the inner self is through engagement with fiction" (p. xvii). By establishing pathways to personal connection through content, Lisa facilitated the relationship between Ellen and Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre's "inherent self-worth" that was central to Lisa's personal reading

and public teaching of the novel, so touched her student, that the discussion extended beyond class and became the stuff of valuable life lesson for Ellen. Jane Eyre-as-role-model will stay with Ellen's student for a lifetime.

By creating a welcoming and safe space for her to voice her innermost fears, and by building the bridge that connects literature to growth and maturity, Lisa hearkens back to the lessons she learned from Mr. A and puts them into practice as an empathetic teacher in her own right. To hearken derives from the verb *to hear* and is "supported by the analogy of *heart* and *hearth"* (*OED Online,* 1989/2008). Lisa's heart-felt reading of *Jane Eyre* transforms her student, Ellen, in the safe hearth of their classroom-home.

Another term for hearkening is to "give ear" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008), which leads to an understanding of the verb *to hear* as an embodiment of the sense. To really hear or listen to someone is a bodily experience that engages ears and heart. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes:

> Only when the existential possibility of discourse and hearing are given, can someone hearken. He who "cannot hear" and "must feel" can perhaps hearken very well precisely for this reason. Just listening around is a privation of the hearing that understands. Discourse and hearing are grounded in understanding. Understanding comes neither from a lot of talking nor from busy listening around. Only he who already understands is able to listen. (p. 154)

What is "the hearing that understands" in the teaching AP English? Lisa hears and understands Ellen *vis a vis* Jane Eyre, much as Mr. A heard and understood Lisa as a young student searching for self worth *vis a vis* classroom skits. Levin (1989) names hearkening as "a mode of perceptiveness that we can only achieve by cultivating our capacity for feeling and listening" (p. 218). What is the experience of "feeling and listening" in the AP English classroom? What happens to our "feeling and listening" when we clock multiple choice test practice or grade our students' in-class essays on the

1-9 College Board rubric? As we recognize desire, ignite passion, and bolster confidence, what happens to our capacity to hearken come test time?

Passion Building

"I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing/than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance" (in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 143), E.E. Cummings writes in his poem, "You Shall Above All Things." In listening to and hearing her student's concerns about self-worth, then offering stories and insights from her own life experience, Lisa learns from her student "how to sing"—how to use her own life stories, with a little help from Charlotte Bronte, to teach and reassure students. Lisa's story about Ellen and reminiscences about Mr. A., bring to the surface why and how she became a teacher in the first place.

When Lisa reflects on her graduate school application essay from the position of an experienced teacher, she writes: "It's funny how much of what I wrote six years ago that I thought was 'fluff' is actually true." In finding the truth in her earliest forays into the teaching realm, she also re-vises, in the sense of seeing a-new, what she wrote as a pre-service teacher:

> It's interesting to me that it's not the confidence building in my students that keeps me here, despite my initial intentions, but rather the passion building, the critical thinking, and even the rising to the challenge of the College Board's test each year.

The College Board's AP Lit exam is included in Lisa's list of what keeps her engaged in teaching AP English, as she considers its challenges to be an important part of not only the "confidence building" aspect of her work, but also the "passion building" that has come to define her mission in the AP classroom.

What is the experience of using a standardized test as a vehicle for confidence and passion building? We may experience standardized tests as confidence-builders, when students practice and put forth a certain type of effort that endures and improves over time, but how can tests be passion-builders? The concept of the AP English exams as passion builders takes some getting used to. Ellsworth (1997) writes:

> The bottom line for assessment purposes is for a student to get it, comprehend it, be "conscious" of it; even if she didn't want to get it, didn't enjoy getting it, or does not intend to use it… (p. 46)

Do the AP English exams take "the bottom line" to new heights? Lisa uses the lofty "rising to the challenge" to name the experience of preparing students for the AP Lit exam. What happens when a student wants to get it, enjoys getting it, and/or intends to use it? What is the "it" in the teaching and testing of AP English? Lisa's experience with Ellen, and other students, puts faces on the often faceless endeavor of standardized testing. Teacher-participant Amy says of her students: "I like to see when they grow, and realize, 'Wow, I can do this.'" Being present to witness growth, Amy and the other participants transform the exam into a personalized, healthy challenge for the students. Aoki (2005b) writes:

> In the rather disembodied language world of the C [Curriculum] & I [Instruction and Implementation] landscape, the *others*—teachers and students—are only implied in words like "implementation," "instruction," and "assessment." …Further, these others become faceless and thus are reducible to some kind of sameness. This becomes discernible when assessment time comes, when all students are subjected to districtwide, provincewide, or even nationwide tests. (p. 299)

Lisa, and the other teacher-participants, add not only faces, but also whole bodies to the "disembodied language world" of traditional curriculum, instruction/implementation, and assessment. The teachers stand between the students and the test as they defy the sameness that "becomes discernible…when all students are

subjected" to the standardized AP English exam in the spring. Tina emphatically states, "The College Board doesn't know my kids and where they are," but her knowledge of her students, and where and who they are, ignite and fuel passion that keeps her teaching "for possibility" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 172), amidst the tensionality in the AP English classroom. Aoki (2005c) reminds us "that to be alive is to live in tension":

> It is the tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck, and that tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung. (p. 162)

Though Lisa learns from "the one bird," Ellen, "how to sing," she fears that she may be, at the same time, teaching "ten thousand stars how not to dance." Six years post-Ellen in her teaching career, more cemented in a tension-filled locale between teaching and testing, Lisa's beliefs are further tested when she reads and reflects upon semester-end course evaluations during this phenomenological study.

Com-passion Building

Lisa's entry does not stop with the naming of passion building as an integral part of her teaching. She continues to question the test's presence, and the feedback students give her, concerning their performance as determined by the College Board's one-through-five exam grading scale:

> I never really thought it would mean more for a student to send me an email thanking me for pushing him and helping him earn a 4 on the AP Lit exam than an email about how I was his favorite teacher and made his day easier, but it does. Maybe this means that test has warped me, too, or maybe I'm just not as nice or compassionate as I thought I was?

To be com-passionate in the AP English classroom is to experience passion together, as well as to suffer together, in a community of learners who are also test takers. Lisa's appreciation for her student's email, but her concern that she, too, may be

"warped" by the emphasis on test scores, illuminates her experience of the tension between teaching in the sense that Mr. A taught her, and teaching in the current climate of hallowed "student achievement," where "effective" teaching is determined by passing scores—fours or fives—on AP exams. Six years into her teaching career, she fears that she may be losing the lessons learned from Mr. A, lessons she was closer to, in time and in practice, as a first year teacher with student Ellen, than she is now.

Lisa attempts to reconcile what she experiences as "a divided life" (Palmer, 1998, p. 167) in her teaching of AP English. Palmer (1998) writes:

> We inhabit institutional settings, including school…because they harbor opportunities that we value. But the claims those institutions make on us are sometimes at odds with our hearts…That tension can be creative, up to a point. It becomes pathological when the heart becomes a wholly owned subsidiary of the organization, when we internalize organizational logic and allow it to overwhelm the logic of our own lives. (p. 167)

What "organizational logic" maybe overwhelming Lisa's life logic? What is it like to stake claims in school-as-institution and school-as-workplace-of-the-heart? In coming into her own as a teacher, has Lisa in-corporated, em-bodied, and adapted to the requirements and reality of teaching AP? Has she reconciled teaching to students and teaching to tests, at the same time? She, along with the other teacher-participants, make AP teaching and testing their own in their daily interactions with students, texts, and tests. To avoid what Palmer terms the pathology of the heart, Lisa and teacher-participants practice Merleau-Ponty's concept of "intertwining," defined as:

> the essential co-origination and interdependence of subject and object, self and other…the ego-logical structuring and enframing [that] lays out between subject and object, self and other, the resonating, co-responsive interdependence of 'differential interplay'. (Levin, 1989, p. 220)

Lisa and the other participants "indwell between two horizons" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 161); the tensionality they experience between teaching and testing, is also the

tensionality between subject and object, self and other. The "resonating, co-responsive 'differential interplay' can be understood as "the necessary condition of the possibility of all relationships" (Levin, 1989, p. 220), in and beyond the AP English classroom. The outside emphasis on the external assessment of the College Board exam invites a fragmentation of which the teachers are aware, while at-once resisting and embracing the inherent contradictions. Jardine, LaGrange, & Everest (2003) write: "We are all living out a deep cultural logic of fragmentation that distracts attention" (p. 204). Tina shares:

> I think when you look at a kid, and you're like, "You, I'm going to bring your scores up"—you're not really focusing on the kid and on what he or she needs. You're focusing on how to get them to a test score where someone else has said you need to get them. So all of a sudden it's just all about testing, testing, testing, testing. Even sometimes when a kid has a more creative approach to something, you almost feel like, "You can't do that, because they want this." It kills some of the enthusiasm and creativity.

The rise of fragmentation "for the sake of our own efficiency" (Jardine, 2003, p. 8), and the impending death of enthusiasm and creativity to which Tina refers, spur the teachers to practical action. Although the teachers in the study are not yet familiar with the work of Ted Aoki (2005c), they seem to practice his wisdom: "We must recognize the flight from the meaning and turn back again to an understanding of our own being as teachers" (p. 164).

Turning back to her understanding of her own being as teacher, Lisa reflects upon and responds to a set of course evaluations from the end of first semester. She writes:

> In the sea of "Mrs. Schwartz rocks," and "Best English class I've ever had!" and "Learned more in this class than in all the rest of high school," and "Good luck on your baby," was the meanest student comment I've received in six years of teaching: "I also believe the class would be better if Mrs. Schwartz appeared more than just a teacher but a person who cares about the lives of her individual students (even if she does not, it would be nice if she pretended she did.)"

Though Lisa is well aware that she will never be everyone's favorite teacher, this comment is an anomaly for her, and she takes it to heart. I ask if she knows who wrote it, if she has students who may be disgruntled by low grades or poor attendance, if she has any idea who may have a personal axe to grind. As the evaluations are completed anonymously online, she has no way of knowing who wrote it, and she doesn't know of any students who may be poised for a personal attack. She is both baffled and bothered by the comment:

> So I read it and I wonder, have I become so remote in my teaching that somehow this student misread me so grossly? Does teaching AP and wanting rigor in the classroom come at the cost of my purpose of becoming a teacher in the first place: to boost the confidence of my students, to ignite passion in their hearts and minds?
>
> The fact that he called me "just a teacher" really hurts, too. This student tells me, or the me he sees, and "that me" is nothing like the teacher or the person I am. I am left to wonder if he misjudged me or if I have failed him and myself this semester.

Akin to Ellen, Lisa's student who questioned her own self worth after reading *Jane Eyre*, Lisa's self worth as a teacher is called into question when she considers how hurt she was by this student's comments. Lisa's sense of self-worth faces a test of her anonymous student's making. Does Lisa's self-doubt stem in part from the AP testing milieu? Greeting students by name at the door, engaging them in class, working with them beyond the school day, and sponsoring several extracurricular activities, are somehow not enough to reach every student and to show everyone that she cares about them as individuals, both in and beyond the classroom, and on and beyond the AP Lit exam in May.

She doesn't expect to maintain 100% approval ratings, but the characterization of her as "just a teacher" takes her a-back. Her wondering, "if that drive for performance

made me pay more attention to what I was getting out of them, than what I was putting in" brings to mind the words of Ellsworth (1997): "The good teacher is the one who gives what s/he doesn't have…" (p. 173). What does Lisa's dissatisfied student want that Lisa is not giving him? Does he expect of her something that she does not have to give? That is not hers to give? Her concern is that perhaps this student is more astute and honest than the others, picking up on her insecurity in the teaching-testing tension that the other students either did not notice, or did not dare mention to her. In the tensionality between "the divided life" (Parker, 1998, p. 167) and "dwelling aright" in the Zone of Between (Aoki, 2005c, p. 164), Lisa wonders if putting in "so much of [her]self" still is not quite enough.

Is This Enough?

Lisa, on the cusp of first-time motherhood, asks herself the same question she is likely to ask herself as a parent many times in the coming years. She would be wise to heed the words of Bruno Bettelheim (1987) derived from D. W. Winnicott: "But it is quite possible to be a good enough parent—that is, a parent who raises his child well" (p. xi). What is "good enough" in the teaching of AP English? Does raising our children well also mean raising their test scores? What is not good enough? James considers these questions and others, in a journal entry:

> What really sets AP Lit apart from an Honors English class? I can teach students a piece of literature. I can stimulate great class discussions. I can construct challenging and engaging assignments, but is that it? I am a very self-critical person, I am always pushing myself to get better. In teaching AP, I find myself constantly wondering, "Is this enough?"

James' question, "Is this enough?" brings to mind Max van Manen's (2003) fundamental pedagogical question: "Did I do the right thing?" (p. 147). It is this very questioning, self-doubt, and constant striving that defines aspects of the pedagogical

nature of the AP English teacher-participants. Van Manen (2003) writes: "Pedagogy *is* this questioning, this doubting" (p. 147). James continues his musings after a day in the classroom with his AP Lit students:

> Right now I am teaching *The Age of Innocence*. I can teach this novel on a number of levels. We can approach it from different critical perspectives, we can look at Wharton's life, the socioeconomic context of her writing, and then, in a nod to deconstructionism, we can question whether Wharton's approach actually undercuts feminism, after all. But in the midst of all this character development and motif-finding, and structural analysis, I still ask myself: "Shouldn't I teach principles of interpretation, not what is the symbolism in Chapter 18? I often feel that I am stopping short of the real point. These things trouble me.

What "things" trouble James? In his teaching of AP Lit, James often has the sense that he's "stopping short of the real point." What is the real point in teaching AP English? Does the "real point" always translate to points earned in a timed setting in the form of test scores? Does James feel that there is a "real point" of which to stop short in his non-AP English classes? James' journal entry's ending, "These things trouble me," names in-part what set him and his AP colleagues a-part from other teachers. Other teachers are troubled or unsettled by what transpires in their classrooms, but does the constant presence and pressure of the test, with the simultaneous expectations from the students that we prepare them for college in a college-like English course in high school, set teachers on a never-ending path of wondering, doubting, refining, reflecting, and revising?

Rigor and Vigor

Greene (1995) writes: "Where standards and rigor are concerned, it is profoundly important to communicate to young people the connection between the discipline or the effort they exert and the possibilities of vision" (p. 182). As we seek real points and rigor in our teaching, are we helping students to make the necessary connections between their

efforts and “the possibilities of vision”? What is it like to share “possibilities of vision” in the AP English classroom? In conversation, James shares:

> It's a rigorous course. I worry sometimes that it is not rigorous enough. I worry sometimes that this is a glorified honors course. But, obviously, each year I try to push myself to make sure I'm maintaining, if not increasing, my rigor.

What is the experience of maintaining and increasing “rigor” in the AP English classroom? The etymological root of the Latin *rigor* is numbness or stiffness (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Van Manen (2003) draws a distinction between the sense of “rigor” in traditional scientific research, and the notion of rigor in phenomenology. Our understanding of “hard data” (p. 17) in the scientific realm refers to knowledge that is “hard-nosed, strict, and uncompromised by ‘subjective’ and qualitative distinctions” (p. 17). Van Manen (2003) contrasts: “A strong and rigorous human science text distinguishes itself by its courage and resolve to stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself” (p. 18). To what uniqueness and significance have we dedicated ourselves and our resolve in AP English? What numbness do we maintain and increase in our teaching? In our quest for higher numb-ers in AP English, are we numb-ing our pedagogy, our relationship with our students, ourselves? Do we become stiff with inflexibility as we conform to the constraints of the College Board exams? We are familiar with the term, *rigor mortis*, “the stiffness of the body following upon death” (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What dies and grows cold when we teach to the test instead of teaching to the students? What happens to vigor in our quest for rigor? Educator Dennis Littky (2004) writes:

> Most people look for rigor in the course syllabus or in the number of hours students spend studying for a test. Sadly, some see rigor when a large number of students can't meet the standard and don't pass. But the rigor that I am talking about is the same rigor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes when he says we can "do no better than to call for…the opportunity for young people to experience intense concentration in any activity that requires skill and discipline…" (p. 116)

The "most people" to whom Littky refers would find "rigor" in the AP English course syllabi and would name as "rigorous" the sheer quantity of time students spend preparing for the test. But might the call for rigor in the AP English classroom also be understood as the call for the intense concentration of the artist-craftsperson in the literary classroom-workshop?

Katherine reminds me that AP exams, unlike state or county exams, are "optional high stakes tests." Even in schools where students are required to take the College Board exam if they are enrolled in an AP course, the students still choose (or their parents choose for them) to register for the course. The exam becomes a vehicle-of-choice not only for confidence and passion building, but also for empowerment, as students learn to use the tools of the literary trades. Some students may even begin to *master* the tools of the literary trades in AP class, as they hone close reading, critical thinking, eloquent speaking, and elegant writing skills.

Despite the standardization of the College Board exams, students can find and use their own voices in the AP English classroom, and on the AP English exams. Veteran AP English teacher Harvard Knowles (2008) writes:

> AP indicates a belief in the depth, the complexity, and especially the power of language to speak to the experience of us all. [Students] should emerge…with the knowledge that it is their imagination, effort, and commitment that breathe life into words, for they should know that it is not just the writer's words that make literature; it is, as well, the reader's imagination. (n.p.)

Fostering the imagination and encouraging students to use their own breaths to en-liven texts, are not the common notions attributed to the realm of high-stakes standardized testing. But borrowing the slogan from parent-activist Susan Harman's tee-shirt: "High stakes are for tomatoes" (In Schrag, 2000, n.p.), the AP English experience is rigorous in its in-vigorating approach to literature, to students, and to personal expression. We would agree that children are not tomatoes, but then again, garden stakes support plants as they reach for the sun, and grow to their full potential. Perhaps a bit severe in their appearance and restrictive to a bound stalk, "staked" tomato plants yield the juiciest and most mature harvest.

May the Force Be With You

Katherine, a vocal supporter of the AP Lit exam from the very beginning of our first conversation, considers the rigor and vigor tension:

> I think it can be frustrating on some days, and when the kids get really frustrated you do start to feel like, "Why am I even doing this?" but most of the time I think [the exam] forces us all to go to places we might not normally go. And where else are you going to read "The Death of a Toad"?

Katherine refers to Richard Wilbur's poem in the essay section of the 1997 English Literature and Composition Exam. The poem, a lofty ode to, "A toad the power mower caught," lives on in AP Lit lore partly due to its droll subject matter, but more due to the letter that the poet wrote in response to an AP teacher who had questions about it after the test (College Board AP Central, 2008b). Although Katherine remarks that the exam "forces," rather than gently prods, goads, leads, or guides, Katherine considers the places they go well worth the catapulted effort.

What is the experience of forcing or being forced in AP English? Knowles (2008) also uses the word "force" to describe an aspect of the exam experience:

> I have been again and again moved by the power of a prompt to animate the minds and imaginations of young writers and *force* them to reach inside themselves and find there possibilities for expression that they surely could not have known they were capable of. (n.p., emphasis added)

In the film *Star Wars*, Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke Skywalker, "May the Force be with you" (Lucas, 1977). It is a benediction of sorts. What force is with us and with our students in our AP teaching and testing? A synonym for the noun *force* is "*vigour*, as an attribute of living beings" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Might the force on which we rely in AP English be a life-force? Might our life-force consist of the summoning of the strengths of our passion and our com-passion as we struggle, along with our sometimes frustrated students, in pursuit of something more than the highest test scores in May?

What happens to our pursuit of fours and fives when we attend to the pulsing life force coursing through the veins of our daily coursework together with our students? In spite of, or in concert with, our love for literature, personal expression, and the art and craft of teaching high school students, the teaching of AP English is also a numbers game. A reality of AP teaching is that students are expected, or in some schools required, to sit for a three-hour exam each spring, and to score high on the one through five scale. Our telling them, "May be the force be with you," may prove insufficient on test day.

AP English By Numbers

In traditional public high school courses, from freshmen English to AP Calculus, grading by numbers—whether percentages or total points—is a fact (and figure) of the teaching life. In AP courses, we do more than grade; we also play a public numbers game whose rules and equations are determined by the College Board. The test has two sections and is three hours long: section one contains 55 multiple choice questions on poems and prose passages, while section two presents three essay prompts to be

completed in two hours. The individual essays are graded on a one through nine scale by AP Readers, high school AP English teachers and college English professors trained by the College Board to read and score essays (College Board AP Central, 2008a). Computers score the multiple choice sections. The Readers, ETS and College Board representatives may be experienced, well-trained, and "objective," but as Tina reminds us: "The College Board doesn't know my kids and where they are."

In knowing the numbers but not the students, are the Readers are at a distinct disadvantage when evaluating what a student has accomplished in three hours on a particular weekday in May? In knowing their students, but not the evaluation process first-hand—none of the teacher-participants has been a Reader—the teachers feel the need and the response-ability to prepare their students as completely as possible for the actual test experience for which they are all held account-able.

Response-ability and Account-ability

Huebner (1999a) writes: "The student encounters other people and natural and man-made phenomena. To these he has the ability to respond. Indeed, education may be conceived to be the influencing of the student's response-ability" (p. 112). What student responses do we influence in our teaching of AP English? Is the realm of our pedagogical influence limited to improving our students' ability to choose the best multiple choice response with the greatest speed, or to respond to a poem or prose passage with a swift, yet elegant essay, thrice over in a two-hour test period? What is it like to influence "patterned forms of response-in-the world" (Huebner, 1999a, p. 113) as well as "fulfillment, and possibility and response-ability" (p. 113)? What is within the realm of our ability-to-respond in the AP English classroom? What is it like to be both response-

able and account-able to our students? What is it like to be response-able and account-able to both our students and to ourselves as teachers?

Responsibility connotes caring, nurturing, a tending-to others; while *accountability* connotes ledgers, spreadsheets, and standardized test scores. We "take" responsibility as we, first-person plural subject, would "take care." Yet, we are "held" accountable—objectified in the passive voice—by some external entity, as one may be "held" prisoner or "held" hostage. What care and responsibility do we take in our teaching of AP English? What holds us prisoner in the very same classroom?

Etymologically, the verb *account* derives from the Old French *conter*, which retains meaning from the Latin *narrare,* to tell (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What stories do our numbers tell in AP English? What "counts" in the AP English classroom? What account do we re-count when our school year is over, our scores are reported, and our students are wandering into the world of college and their burgeoning adult lives? What do we count-on in our teaching? For what do our students count-on us?

Our students' counting-on, or relying-on us, is also our response-ability—our ability to respond—to them. Katherine writes: "We have to give grades. And we have to prepare students for the test. That is the 'measurable' part of the job we are hired to do." Katherine uses the word *job* in its singular form, though giving grades and preparing students for the test can be viewed as at least two, maybe more, distinctive activities. In using the catch-all descriptor *job,* is Katherine confusing scoring with teaching, or testing with teaching? Or is she giving voice to the multiple facets of our job description, as-lived and as-plan (Aoki, 2005c, p. 163): as-lived by us in our classrooms with our

students every day, but also as-planned by the human resources department through our more official job description?

The etymology of the word *job* is uncertain, but its history reveals an original meaning of "piece" or "mass," and more specifically may refer to "the idea of a quantity moved or carried rather than the effort involved in doing so" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Are our students "moved" by their shared experiences with us in the AP English classroom? In living the *advanced* part of advanced placement, are they carried—piece by piece—to a next stage, phase, or course placement? *To educate*, from the Latin *educere*, is literally "to lead forth" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What is it like to lead our students forth, by piece or mass, to the next place-ment in their life journey?

Amy shares: "Kids get out of it what they put into it, and you know, some kids may never get there. But unfortunately, the reality is that we are held responsible. I mean it's awful." Where is the "there" that some kids reach, while others do not? Is it a passing test score? Or is it a "there" in the Gertrude Stein sense: "there is no there there" (1937/1971, p. 289)? Finally, what is awful about our response-ability part of the journey? Is it only awful as in horrible, or might it be awe-full, full of awe? Amy continues:

> I look at my numbers and there were seven 1s last year, and six of them were mine. But then, I also had 2s, and I had 3s, and I had 4s, and I had 5s, and the majority of my students scored 2 to 4. Renee Shea (College Board professional developer) says that you should never be held accountable for your scores your first two years of AP teaching. I thought, okay, I'm good.

Amy's students' test scores become what Amy deems, "my numbers." Along with her vital statistics—height, weight, blood pressure—are her students' scores on the College Board's AP English Language exam. Her rationale that she need not be "held accountable" for students' scores until her third year of teaching AP, may prove a bit

problematic. What happens in year three, if her students are still earning low scores? Will she continue to conclude, “Okay, I’m good”? Does she suddenly turn “bad”? What happens to teaching, learning, and being-with students in the AP English classroom when the scores really “count,” as a direct (or indirect) reflection of a teacher’s ability to educate, or lead her students forth? Where will the students “end up” or “find themselves” if they “never get there”? James also leads forth his students to “somewhere”:

> With students who maybe don’t have all of the skills, I try to show them where they can be successful. You may not write the best essay, but look, you know, skip a couple of multiple-choice questions, answer most of them right, or answer some of them right. You're going to get the point somewhere. And I think the AP test is good in that sense that it has different avenues to be successful. So that's one way.

But will all students “get the point somewhere”? And what is the point? Can a student earn a low test score but still make the grade, or “get the point” in understanding and experiencing literature and new forms of expression? And where is the point to be found? Is it only in a score report, or in other locations, as well? May some students, as Amy points out, “never get there”? And what if there is no there there?

Ellsworth (1997) writes: “Perfect fits are impossible…between text and reading, modes of address and viewer interpretation, [and] curriculum and learning” (p. 47). What is the experience of accepting the absence of “perfect fits” in the teaching of AP English? If among our goals is helping our students earn fives on the College Board exams, are we not striving for perfection? James’ map to the “different avenues to be successful” on the AP Lit exam represents not “one way” but myriad ways to “make it” or “get there” as he makes do, meets students where they are, and accepts the absence of “perfect fits”:

> I show them, look, you can do this, and you can do this, and you can still end up with 4. I show them the math on it, and it's psychological, and I think it really works because it comes when they're feeling scared, low, and like they're not going to make it, and then I kind of show them.

When Amy's department chairperson asked her to teach AP English for the first time, she told Amy that she was someone who would, "challenge the students but not frighten them." For the teacher-participants, being response-able and account-able in AP English finds them yet again dwelling aright in the Zone of Between, and plucking melodies for all to sing from the taut strings of tension between challenging and reassuring, doubting and believing, grasping and letting go.

Grasping and Letting Go

Sennett (2008) writes, "To say that we 'grasp something' implies that we reach for it" (p. 153). In grasping, we anticipate the holding—a cup, a pencil, a hand—before we actually make physical contact. "Mentally," Sennett (2008) continues, "we 'grasp something' when we understand the concept" (p. 154). Phenomenologically, in our quest to understand and name aspects of the essence of the lived experience, we practice "reflective grasping" (van Manen, 2003, p. 32) and illuminate what grasps, or presents itself, to us. In a similar vein, in the teaching of AP English, we want our students to grasp for—in the physical sense of reaching-with-readiness—what's to come, to anticipate, and also to grasp, and be grasped by, a sense of deep understanding. On test day, we want our students to wrap their fingers around a number two pencil, while wrapping their heads around the knowledge required to fill in the correct bubbles on the scantron forms. We want our students to grip their trusted pens with confidence and write, in the form of three essays in two hours, the ideas that they hold in their heads and

hearts. But Sennett (2008) warns: “There is a problem about grips…This is how to let go” (p. 151).

What is it like for teachers to grasp and to let go in the AP English classroom? In our experience as teachers-as-master-craftspeople and teachers-as-parents, we “grasp” our apprentice-children only to have to let them go in a relatively short period of time. Van Manen (1991) writes:

> A teacher’s affection for a pupil, like a parent’s affection for a child, is premised to a large extent on the value of becoming and growth…A parent, like a teacher, loves a child as a person who is essentially in the process of becoming. (p. 67)

And what of the children who sit in our classrooms now? Each child’s meaning for me, and for the conversants, “lies in the present” (van Manen, 1991, p. 67), yet at same time, in the future. Do not all teachers wish for their students to grow to be critical readers, independent thinkers, and lifelong learners? Yes, but AP teachers have the multiple aspirations of wanting their students to pass the AP English exam, be exempt from introductory college English, and also grow to be lifelong readers, thinkers, and learners. Amanda states, “My goal for my students is to be well-read, well-spoken, and ready for college.” The multiple aspirations are not mutually exclusive, but is it necessary to earn college credit to be “ready for college” before setting foot on a university campus? Tina posits:

> My students will get to college and they can have the college experience there. They can grow and they can learn and it can be fun. They’ll get college experience later on. I don't think it’s necessary that they get the college experience in high school.

Is it even possible to get the “college experience” in high school? In-habiting the high school AP English classroom with our students for a year (or a semester for Tina), invites them to share in our frustrations and celebrations of dwelling aright in the many

Zones of Between. Among the skills we model for our students is living in the tensions: between art and craft, teaching and testing, learning and testing-taking, high school and college, and childhood and adulthood. No matter how ritualized our AP Fridays or how high our students score on the AP exam, we journey with our students on the path to adulthood, as we are all in the process of becoming. Van Manen (1991) writes of a student:

> Obviously I do not know who or what this child will become; I cannot tell the future…I notice signs of a new maturity: a personal way of talking, a new pleasant confidence or a disarming shyness, a surprising critical judgment, a hard-won ability, an unsuspected talent, a certain way of walking, gesturing, or moving the body—it is in many little things that we see a child learn and grow up. (67)

What are the "many little things" we see in our AP English classrooms? What art/craft, teaching/testing, learning/loving inform our experience? Re-calling James' language, what is the real point? Greene (1995) writes:

> As we ponder educational purposes, we might take into account the possibility that the main point of education (in the context of a lived life) is to enable a human being to become increasingly mindful with regard to his or her lived situation—and its untapped possibilities. (p. 182)

As we seek to tap untapped possibilities, in ourselves and our students, we also let-learn to let-go of the prescribed and the fixed, relying on our experience, innovation, and intuition. Sennett (2008) writes:

> Intuition begins with the sense that what isn't yet could be. How do we sense this? In technical craftsmanship, the sense of possibility is grounded in feeling frustrated by a tool's limits or provoked by its untested possibilities. (pp. 209-210)

In this chapter I name and explore aspects of the phenomenological question: **What is like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?** What are the "untested possibilities" in the teaching of

AP English? The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, when designing a house for his sister in Vienna is purported to have said: “I am not interested in erecting a building, but in…presenting to myself the foundations of all possible buildings” (In Sennett, 2008, p. 254). What “foundations of all possible buildings” might we be constructing with our students? As we teach “for possibility” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 172) in the AP English classroom—tapped and untapped, tested and untested—we hold our students’ presents and futures in our hands, and we rely on intuition, experience, and pedagogical tact to know when to grasp, when to-be grasped, and when to let-go. In Chapter Five, I explore the future we cannot tell, as well as the hopes we glean from our daily passionate work with our student-apprentices in the AP English classroom-workshop, and what we may build on the foundations of those hopes and those passions.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CORONATING MAGICAL MINDS IN PASSIONATE PLACES OF HOPE

> A school ought to be a magical place where you are a queen or king, and where what you get to do is to focus on your intellect, and on what you can accomplish as a human being, and you come to understand what your life can be. That's what a school should be for children. *Not a place where you go to study for a standardized test.* Not a place where you go where people tell you that you are under-performing. Not a place where you go where people tell you that you are part of some pathology. That's not what a school is supposed to be. School is supposed to be full of hope, and it's a place where you go to find out how magical your mind is and how terrific it will be when you develop your mind to its full potential. (Simmons in Frey, 2001, p. C1, emphasis added)

Shortly after Ruth Simmons was appointed the president of Brown University in 2001, making her the first African American president of an Ivy League institution, a *Washington Post* reporter asked her: What should a school be? Her answer, quoted above, is a response to the current state of affairs in the nation's public schools. With the advent and enforcement of the federal mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), we are experiencing an increased reliance on standardized test scores to determine the merits of a public school, the worthiness of its students, and the effectiveness of its teachers. Testing our patience as educators, NCLB has also become known as No Child Left Untested. Running scantrons through scoring machines, reporting results to central office, and awaiting graphs of disaggregated numerical data do little to foster Dr. Simmon's ideal of school as "a magical place where [students] are a king or a queen" who are developing their minds to their "full potential" (p. C1).

Yet, if we delve behind the headlines and beyond the pie charts; if like Alice en route to Wonderland, we fling ourselves headlong down the rabbit-hole, will we find those magical places of hope that a school ought to be, according to the vision of Ruth Simmons? As I travel the last leg of my phenomenological journey to make meaning and

to make sense of **what it is like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing**, I confess that my journey has been far longer than I anticipated at the outset. I work in "slow craft time" (Sennet, 2007, p. 295). I've returned to the earlier chapters of this dissertation more than once to make corrections as the non-profit College Board raised the exam prices from $77.00 to its current $86.00. I've also witnessed a sea change in the number of students who take Advanced Placement courses, and their attendant exams. I've watched the standardized testing movement complete its choke-hold on public high schools in ways unimaginable when I began my doctoral program coursework in 2000.

As I write in Chapter One, my interest in the phenomenon of being caught in the tension between teaching and testing began during a multiple choice practice session in my fifth period Advanced Placement Literature (AP Lit) class. When student Molly asked, in earnest, if she should read the poem, "A Whippoorwill in the Woods," before answering the multiple choice questions that followed, I may have become impatient, frustrated, or even angry. Yet a-kin to the six teacher-participants in this phenomenological inquiry, I accepted her question—and her classmate Julia's supportive, "That's what we learned in SAT Prep"—as a healthy and honest challenge whose range of responses proved more valuable than a high score on the practice multiple choice questions before us on the photocopied page that afternoon. Little did I know then, but Molly's question pointed me on a path of reflection, re-vision, and re-newal that led to this doctoral dissertation. Molly's question and classmate Julia's follow-up question about the poem—"Are we really supposed to appreciate this stuff?"—exposed a gnawing discomfort that I was experiencing with neither name nor source before I began this

phenomenological study. After structuring meaning in Chapter Four as identified, named, and explored thematic renderings, I pause now to reflect on and address the question: What does it all mean?

I revert to my time-worn advice to students when writing conclusions for their essays that I mention in Chapter One: be sure that your final paragraph answers the question, So what? So what if teaching AP English is the experience of making things present? So what if teaching AP English is neither art nor craft, but dwelling aright in the tension somewhere in the "Zone of Between" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 163)? So what if we dwell at-once in teaching and testing, high school and college, childhood and adulthood? Dwelling in such questions of significance leads to another question that I often ask myself here, in the place I am now situated, mid-career and midlife: Now what?

Van Manen (2003) writes: "Qualitative research (*qualis* means "whatness") asks the *ti estin* question: What is it? What is this phenomenon in its whatness?" (p. 33). To consider the "so what" and "now what"—to illuminate the "whatness" of the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement English in public high school—I look to Julie Andrews. One of my favorite childhood films was *Mary Poppins* (Bossert & Stevenson, 1964) with Julie Andrews as Mary, and Dick Van Dyck as Bert the chimney sweep. The movie became a favorite of my son's, too, and as a preschooler of his generation, he had the luxury of watching it on video over and over. As I write my way to understanding the parts of my long phenomenological journey, and begin to name the pedagogical implications of the phenomenological whole, I re-call a harried and surprised Mr. Banks returning to his London mansion at Number Seventeen, Cherry Tree Lane. Faced with a foyer full of sooty chimney sweeps, Mr. Banks exclaims: "What's all this?"

To which, the dancing chimney sweeps echo in a lively chorus line: “What’s all this? What’s all this?” In this final chapter of my dissertation, I mimic Mr. Banks and the chimney sweeps, minus the choreographed high kicks, to express the “whatness,” as well as the “whereness,” of the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement English in public high school while caught in the tension between teaching and testing.

Locating the Particular Locale

I open this final chapter of my dissertation with a quotation by Dr. Simmons, in which she suggests that rather than view children as test-taking organisms in danger of becoming “part of some pathology,” we instead crown them “queen or king.” Though most of us are loathe to stage elaborate coronation ceremonies in our classrooms, let alone treat children as royalty, we may embrace the metaphor of honoring our students, reminding them of their importance and potential, while fueling their intellectual passions.

The word *potential* shares a root with *potentate*, both relating to power or ability (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). The students in our AP English classrooms are able potentates with powerful potential. Though our students are not (usually) our biological children, our pedagogical relationship with them as *in loco parentis* forms connections that run deep. Van Manen (2003) writes of Rilke’s notion of “blood remembering” (p. 133) that “implies a recognition of the memory that children are indeed of our blood”:

> A recognition that, like a vow, becomes full of an unconditional quality, a recognition that is a heeding of the sign of a presence. And we experience this incarnation of this presence in the “us” from which our hope in this child derives its meaning—that is to say, a togetherness of which we proclaim the indestructibility. (p. 133)

What vows do we take and live-out as teachers of AP English? What “blood remembering” do we draw upon as we come-together with our students in the presence

that is the lived experience of teaching AP English? What "togetherness" or "us" do we be-come that proclaims hope and indestructibility in the face of mounting external pressures for "excellence" and "achievement" in the narrow form of high test scores? What is it like to teach the whole child, and to teach for wholeness, when we are steeped in a con-tested culture of educational fragmentation and standardized tests?

Fragmentation and wholeness are among the tensions within which we struggle to dwell aright in our teaching of AP English. Our high school day is sliced into 50-minute segments, and our experience of time is choppy and often frenetic. Each segment is peopled with 25-35 different students, and each class, even if the same subject and grade level, is broken into even smaller units of study, lessons, and activities. And that is only in the "curriculum-as-plan" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 161). In the "curriculum-as-lived" (Aoki, 2005c, p. 161), in the thing itself that is the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement English, we add the conversations and thoughts that would appear as so many bubbles above our heads were we characters in a cartoon strip, not to mention the myriad gestures and expressions that we emit every class period throughout the day.

In my work interpreting the lived experience of teaching AP English in public high school, I note the paradox inherent in experiencing educational fragmentation as wholeness. Jardine, Clifford and Friesen (2003) write:

> Each task faced in the classroom is precisely not an isolated fragment which must be quickly covered and then dropped in order to get on to the next bit. Rather, classroom and curriculum topics, conversations and events are treated as ways in to the whole of the living inheritances that have been handed to teachers and students in schools. One is never "doing" an isolated fragment, but always "doing" the whole living field from a particular locale. (p. 12)

What "ways in" do we forge and travel in the AP English classroom? What is the lived experience of sharing "living inheritances" with our students? What is it like to

engage in “doing the whole living field from a particular locale”? Where is our particular locale? In the teaching of AP English in public school, are our particular locales not only our classrooms in our school buildings, but also our magical places full of hope to which Dr. Simmons alludes? Might we offer our experiences of wholeness and hopefulness in the AP English classroom to other classroom communities beholden to the constraints and demands of standardized testing?

Tracing the Royal Bloodlines

Jardine, Clifford and Friesen (2003) name “age-old bloodlines in human life” as the connection that keeps us whole in our pedagogical being-with students in our teaching and learning. Using the curricular concept of time, they offer the following example of how we might experience fragmentation and wholeness in our teaching:

> Moreover, when individual students’ quandaries and questions about time arise, they are not treated pathologically, but are treated as addressing these bloodlines and each person’s place within them. Thus, teachers and students alike are treated as if they are *already deeply part of these bloodlines*, such that dealing with “time” as a topic in school is at once exploring our own implications within it. (p. 12)

What is it like to treat students’ quandaries and questions not pathologically, but as deep parts of our bloodlines? I re-call Molly and Julia’s questions from Chapter One which launched this phenomenological study. I am also reminded of the episode I share in Chapter Four: Katherine’s reaction to her AP Lit students when they protested that the assigned poetry was too difficult, and that she hadn’t taught them how to read and understand it. Her response, after initial impatience, was to tap into their shared bloodlines, and those of her colleagues, to identify and share the knowledge, what Polyani terms “tacit knowledge” (in Applebee, 1996, p. 11), that they already possess but were hesitant to put into practice.

Tacit knowledge, according to Applebee (1996) is "fundamentally personal" (p. 11), and arises from "participation in the tradition, the development of shared exemplars and shared experiences, rather than from study of knowledge-out-of-context or memorization of rules of procedure" (p. 12). Eschewing the inclination to identify frustrated students as part of some pathology, Katherine and her colleagues instead coronate them, honoring their shared royal lineage or human bloodlines, and gather them into the regal fold of literary conversation, involvement, and community. The students' frustrations and resulting questions—which through adolescent lips may sound more whined than posed—give voice to the process of be-coming a-part, rather than falling a-part. We share with our students a willingness and desire to connect to the literature, to literary traditions both old and new, and to the particular locale: the AP English classroom in its fragmentation and its wholeness.

Synecdoche in the Key of Hope

In Chapter Three of this dissertation, I write of my work being informed phenomenologically by the "dynamic interplay among six research activities" (p. 30) as put forth by van Manen (2003). The last activity, "Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole" (p. 33) compels me to "constantly measure the overall design of the study/text against the significance that the parts must play in the total textual structure" (p. 33). Taking or mis-taking parts for the whole recalls the literary term of *synecdoche*. As a rhetorical device, synecdoche is "a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole object or idea" (Beckson & Ganz, 1993, p. 277) or *vice versa* (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). Oft-cited examples of synecdoche include referring to a

nation's leader as the head of state, or asking for a group of helpers by calling for all hands on deck.

In its Greek origin, *synecdoche* literally means "to take with something else" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What am I taking-with in my hermeneutic inquiry of the lived experience of AP English teachers in public high school? What some-thing else am I taking-with in making/taking meanings from my explorations? Am I taking or mis-taking parts for whole or whole for part? Ever the reluctant math student, I am loathe, yet compelled, to ask: what sum might the parts represent, or what whole might emerge by adding the parts to-gether? Van Manen (2003) warns: "It is easy to get so buried in writing that one no longer knows where to go, what to do next, how to get out of the hole that one has dug" (p. 33). In my quest for the *ti estin?,* or the whatness, of teaching AP English in public high school, I have dug deep and sifted through layers of experience and meaning of the six teacher-participants. Yet, like Bert and the chimney sweeps in *Mary Poppins,* I, too, "Step in time; step in time" (Bossert & Stevenson, 1964), executing one high kick after the next, to keep moving in a steady forward progression, as so many solo dancers come together, emerging from behind closed classroom doors, to form one glorious chorus line.

Same Team

The Latin phrase, *E Pluribus Unum,* "out of many, one," from the official seal of the United States of America by way of Virgil, expresses aspects of our lived experience in teaching AP English. As we struggle to dwell aright with-in the tensions of teaching and testing, art and craft, high school and college, and childhood and adulthood, may we share our wisdom, our multi-textured cloths of woven experiences, and our passionate

dedication to pedagogical possibilities with our colleagues, with those who teach other Advanced Placement subjects, as well as all public school teachers whose classrooms are tied to external measurement systems? In a similar way that we soccer parents on the sidelines call, “Same team,” to our young players on the field, who need constant reminders that sharing and passing the ball are important aspects of the team game, we teachers, too, may need the reminder that we are all in this together: *E Pluribus Unum*, same team.

As we offer hope for humane, caring, and meaning-ful pedagogy in an age of standardized testing, we look toward retaining our identities and continuing to “teach who we are” (Palmer, 1998, p. 2) in and beyond the Advanced Placement classroom. The six teachers in this study illuminate how, both to-gether and a-part, we become one, “same team,” while preserving our essential nature. Although the AP English teacher-participants teach literature—fiction, poetry, and drama, spanning time periods from *Beowulf* to *Beloved*—they each claim areas of specialization. Amy shares, “I’m very good at poetry, it’s one of my specialties.” Lisa admits, “I’m guilty of liking to teach what I like to read. I am a poetry person, that’s really where my love for English comes from.” Katherine’s expertise is 18th century British literature and rhetoric. James declares 19th and 20th century American literature as his “area of expertise.” Amanda loves the American southern gothic authors, particularly Flannery O’Connor and William Faulkner, but names Shakespeare as her favorite writer to teach. Our disparate parts form a unified whole, as we work in concert with our students to teach and learn who we are, as we are all in the process of be-coming. To paraphrase Greene (in Pinar, 1998): *We* are who *we* are not yet. What is it like when our seemingly disparate parts form a mighty

whole as we embrace fragmentation and wholeness in the hope-ful pedagogical place that is the AP English classroom? What does such fragmentation and wholeness look like?

Assembling Five Sonnets

At a recent faculty meeting where we were—what else?—being trained and "certified" to administer yet another round of state-mandated standardized tests, I whispered to Ms. D, the colleague sitting next to me, that I would rather be participating in a scavenger hunt. I was only kidding, as I become equally annoyed with forced bonding or "community building" activities at mandatory staff meetings, but Ms. D whispered back, "We're having one in AP Lit tomorrow, come by."

I took up Ms. D on her invitation, and the next day was privileged to witness a literal and literary coming-together of community, as well as tacit knowledge-in-action, in a particular locale, the AP Lit classroom. When I entered, the class was already in progress, and I read the objective posted on the board (required in our school): "Students will be able to Assemble Five Sonnets." I also noticed a stopwatch ticking away on the projection screen, as about thirty high school seniors walked around the room with index cards, calling out what sounded to be random questions and non-sequitors in iambic pentameter.

Having versed the students in the form and structure of Shakespearean sonnets in prior classes, today Ms. D had distributed to each student an index card on which was taped a quatrain or couplet to one of five complete sonnets. The students' mission was to find and join with the other members of their yet-to-be-determined sonnet group to form the five different sonnets that Ms. D had "dismembered" and taped on the cards. After re-

assembling the sonnet in proper order, each sonnet group was to write about their sonnet's meaning and theme, and share their writing with the class.

In the scavenger-hunt like atmosphere, the students tackle the task as an exuberant group of much younger children at a birthday party. The ticking stopwatch adds to their excitement and enthusiasm, as students race to assemble sonnets as quickly as they can. While the students work the room and compare cards, looking for similar content or some thread of connectedness, one calls, "Anyone have anything about crazy people?" Another asks, "Who has a 'madding fever'? Looking for a 'madding fever.'" Soon the "crazy people" student finds the "madding fever" student, only to realize that they don't belong together. Another student says, "I'm about being proud. Who's proud?" The students wander the room, reading their classmates' cards, then re-reading their own. A few students gather around a desk, get a good glimpse of their cards on the flat surface, and rearrange. One student directs the other two, "I'm below you. And you go on the bottom." Another student adds, "We need an ending that's not Anna." An undeterred Anna scoops up her card, and takes her rhyming couplet elsewhere. A clump of 15 students forms in the center of the room, from which emerges several triumphant students high-fiving, holding index cards held high above their heads like little white trophies: "Yes! Yes! We have a sonnet. Woo hoo!"

Ms. D turns to me and remarks, "I hate traditional ways of teaching poetry." The traditional way of teaching poetry to which Ms. D alludes would have these same students sitting at their desks, the five sonnets on photocopied sheets before them, while Ms. D pokes, prods, and acquiesces to giving meaning. Traditional ways of teaching poetry do not elicit high-fives and woo hoo's. The "assemble five sonnets" activity is

interactive, collaborative, kinesthetic, as well as vigorous and rigorous. The stopwatch counts down to zero well before all the students have found their groups, but no one notices. I point out the stopped clock to Ms. D and she shrugs, "That was only to get us started." The stopwatch stops neither time nor engagement.

Today, Ms. D's classroom is a hopeful, happy place—a particular locale—where students feel empowered and terrific. Although these students will be taking a high-stakes standardized test in May, the College Board AP Lit Exam, they are not "drilling" for a standardized test. Yet, the "assemble five sonnets" activity prepares them for the exam in myriad ways: students come to own "their" sonnet, while becoming familiar with the other four, and they practice close reading skills in locating, assembling, making, and sharing meaning of difficult, almost inaccessible Elizabethan poetry. They approach the literature cold, never having studied these exact sonnets, just as they will with literature on the exam in May. In the warm, safe haven of AP Lit class, among friends and fun, their future tendency will be to neither hate nor fear Elizabethan sonnets, and perhaps they will approach other difficult, seemingly inaccessible literature with equanimity and good cheer. Their teacher, Ms. D., is hopeful and happy, too.

Taking Aim for Happiness

Noddings (2003) writes: "If we accept happiness as an aim of education, we will be concerned with both the quality of the present experience and the likely contribution of that experience to future happiness" (p. 251). The etymological root of *aim* is the Old French *estimer,* in English, *to esteem*, or *estimate*. To esteem is "to estimate value," and also "to regard as valuable; to think highly of" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008), and to respect. What do we esteem in teaching AP English in public school? What is it like to "regard as

valuable" our students' happiness when they are in our classroom care? What is the experience of practicing our art and our craft with respect? Ms. D did not write on the blackboard, "Students will be able to be happy" as one of her measurable behavioral objectives for the day's lesson, but she knows that the students en-joy the activity of assembling five sonnets, and learn more about sonnets, each other, and themselves, in the process. Noddings (2003) supports Ms. D's approach:

> If the aim of teaching poetry is delight and wisdom, then the pedagogical methods chosen should make those ends likely. It means also that, in monitoring the effects of our work, we will look for signs of joy, deep thought, and eagerness to read more and hear more. (p. 252)

Delight and wisdom abound in Ms. D's class today, and as a visitor, I read the signs of joy ("Woo hoo we have a sonnet!"), the deep thought required to find the appropriate sonnet buddies, and the eagerness to hear which quatrains and couplets wound up with whom, and finally, what they all mean. Every one of the 28 students in class is actively engaged throughout the activity, finding his/her way to his/her sonnets and helping others, too.

Ms. D, an avid softball player, exemplifies teacher-as-coach (Sizer, 1985), pitching hints with care, and giving gentle but emphatic no's when a few of the card combinations are out in left field. Sizer (1985) extends the sports analogy:

> I can tell you how to throw a javelin. I can show you movies of people throwing the javelin, and I can analyze these movie athletes, good and bad….But until you pick the instrument up and hurl it, the whole process is an abstraction. (p. 106)

Every student in Ms. D's class holds a javelin on an index card. The collective hurl helps the students develop both their individual skill and their team techniques. The AP Lit class can hardly be expected to play "sonnet scavenger hunt" or course term *Jeopardy!* every day, but they engage in such collaborative and interactive activities often

enough that getting on their feet and running around the room looking for a fellow "madding fever" seem quite natural. Through knowing most of the students in the room, I am aware that Ms. D expects a full range of scores on the exam in the spring. But today Ms. D's classroom is a particular magical locale, and is not about test scores. The students wear the crowns of wholeness and accomplishment as they are successful in their quest to take their rightful place in the kingdom of sonnets. Everyone performs beautifully, everyone works to his/her full potential, and no one is part of anyone's pathology. The parts come together and make five whole sonnets. The five wholes come together to create yet another whole: an engaged and enthusiastic community of learners. And there are no holes in the whole. Tomorrow may be a more traditional day, or tomorrow may even be AP Friday, but they will always have Assemble Five Sonnets Day, and the happy experience of *E Pluribus Unum*, same team.

Wide Open Spaces

The Assemble Five Sonnets activity is a practical example of Huebner's (1999a) assertion that an educational activity may be viewed through an esthetic lens as an "art object" (p. 109):

> The art object, in this case educational activity, is the possibility of life, captured and heightened and standing apart from the world of production, consumption and intent. The art object has beauty. Educational activity can have beauty…Educational activity may thus be valued in terms of its sense of wholeness, of balance, of design and integrity, and its sense of peace and contentment. (p. 109)

What "possibility of life" is Ms. D instilling in her students with the fragmentation and subsequent making-whole of five Shakespearean sonnets? How far from the College Board's "world of production, consumption and intent" are the students

in Ms. D's classroom? What wholeness, what sense of peace and contentment, may be derived from the educational activity of taking a-part and putting back to-gether?

The Dixie Chicks sing of a young woman's need for "Wide open spaces/Room to make her big mistakes" (Gibson, 1997, track 2). As the students wander the room in search of their "sonnet buddies," they can only mend Ms. D's dismemberment of the sonnets and make-whole again by making big, and many, mistakes: the "madding fever" does not belong with the "crazy people"; Anna and her rhyming couplet are voted off the island in record time. The students rely, in part, on their intuition and imagination to find the "right" answer. Ms. D, with gentle re-direction and constant vigilance, encourages their wondering and wandering. Sizer (1985) writes: "Schools that always insist on the right answer, with no concern as to how a student reaches it, smother the student's efforts to become an effective intuitive thinker" (p. 105). There is no smothering in Ms. D's class today; we are a-world a-way from the particular locale of the standardized test, where a student has one three-hour session in May to be as perfect as possible, where there are no second chances, no time for wondering and wandering, and where when the clock stops, the pencils go down, and the test booklets are closed.

As we pre-pare our students for the exam in May, may we also pair-with them to re-pair the damage inflicted by an over-reliance on standardized test scores in a culture of advanced placement, a culture that increasingly imparts the message that "The only hope of at least *attempting* to keep up is *acceleration*" (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, p. 12)? In registering for Advanced Placement courses, high school students receive the message that they are not where they should and could be: there are better, higher, more mature and "advanced" college-level classes that they must take while still in high school. Can

we, should we, teach for high school credit and for college credit simultaneously, while teaching for both possibility and for high test scores? Can we, at the same time, embrace the paradox to both fragment and make-whole in the AP English classroom? Can we fully teach the students who sit before us in the present, while teaching toward their future individual exam performance, and their collective passing rates?

Thinking the World Together

Palmer (1998) challenges us to accept "the concept of paradox" (p. 62), and "to think the world together" (p. 62) while "thinking the world apart" (p. 62) in our teaching: "Either-or thinking has also given us a fragmented sense of reality that destroys the wholeness and wonder of life" (p. 62). He implores us to embrace either-or thinking together-with "*both-and*" (p. 62) thinking: "We must learn to embrace those opposites as one" (p. 63). Palmer names the place where we embrace opposites and settle into paradox as "the realm of profound truth, where, if we want to know what is essential, we must stop thinking the world into pieces and start thinking it together again" (p. 63).

What is essential in the teaching of AP English? The etymology of *essential* is the Latin *essentia,* from *esse*, "to be" (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). What is it like to teach in the realm of profound truths from our essential nature, or essence of our being? Might our pedagogical tact in teaching, testing, and learning, find homes in other public school classrooms bound by standardized test scores? Might the profound truths from the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement English in public high school illuminate healthy and whole ways-of-being with students in other courses across content areas, grade levels, and age ranges?

In the current educational climate, it seems neither adequate nor appropriate for students to read, write, or earn course credit “on grade level.” Even honors-level courses have become passé, as students must be advanced to a place they are not-yet to be deemed successful, and for their schools to be considered equitable. In the county where I teach and live, the expectations are that “good” students must master high school-level mathematics while in middle school, and college-level mathematics, like multi-variable calculus, and other subjects, while still in high school. If students take classes termed “on grade level,” the thinking goes, then they are not being adequately challenged.

What is the experience of adequately challenging students? What happens to the Heideggerian notion of teaching as letting-learn (Heidegger, 1993b) when our aim is to “challenge” students not by meeting them where they are, but by advancing them to a place where they are not-yet? The etymology of the verb *to challenge* is the Latin, *caluminari*, “to accuse falsely” (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). As a noun, *challenge* derives from the Latin, *calumnia*: “trickery, artifice, [and] misrepresentation” (*OED Online*, 1989/2008). In the name of challenging students, are we not devising tricks, playing word games with course titles and credits, and misrepresenting grade levels and degrees of difficulty?

When students take geometry as eighth graders, rather than as high school sophomores, doesn’t geometry then become eighth grade math? When “gifted” elementary school students complete two grade levels of math in one year, haven’t they still completed one year of math? When high school freshmen enroll in a special section of Advanced Placement US History for ninth graders only, does it not become a ninth grade history class, rather than a college history class? When and by what means have so

many public school students become so "advanced" that they can shift from middle school coursework to college coursework, taking only their health and physical education credits on the high-school level in the intervening years? Sometimes it seems that if not for health class, physical education requirements, and the senior prom, "capable" students would skip the four years of high school and head straight to college from the eighth grade.

Noddings (2003) recommends that in the realm of Advanced Placement, we "*invite* student participation; we do not coerce" (p. 255). In my experience, and in the experience of the six teacher-participants in this phenomenological study, increasing numbers of students are coerced into registering for Advanced Placement courses. Amanda's affluent suburban high school, with a senior class of 600 students, currently has nine sections of AP Lit: "There are way too many students in AP at this school, but that's sort of how the rankings are determined, and they push kids into AP who probably shouldn't be there." Noddings (2003) urges us to provide opportunities and encouragement to students whose "genuine intellectual interests" (p. 218) give them "happiness—even joy—from their engagement with a chosen topic" (p. 218), but also laments:

> Advanced Placement courses…are not always invitations to genuine intellectual experience. More often they are inducements to compete with other students, to obtain a higher grade-point average, and to impress college admissions committees. They are sometimes inspired by the desire to get a certain subject behind them, not to study it further. Deep intellectual interest may even impede the goals of those students who perceive Advanced Placement courses as instrumental to narrowly defined forms of success. (p. 218)

If we removed the incentives of weighted grade point averages, inexpensive college credit, and other "external rewards" (Noddings, 2003, p. 219), would Amanda's

school still be able to offer nine sections of AP Lit? By encouraging, or in some cases coercing, students to register for AP courses, are we encouraging sixteen year olds to pad their resumes, rather than focusing on course offerings for the "passionately interested" (Noddings, 2003, p. 219)? Are we keeping our students' and our own best pedagogical interests at-heart when we meet all students where they are in our AP English classes, no matter how ill-prepared or dis-interested they maybe in the work-at-hand? Are we opening wide the particular locale of the AP English classroom when we welcome outside influences beyond our control and in spite of our better judgment? By channeling more students into AP courses, are we challenging our students to think for themselves and find their passions, or are we complicit in returning to the Latin etymological roots of *challenge* as trickery, artifice, and misrepresentation?

Challenging the Challenge Index

The Jay Mathews Challenge Index, where a public high school is judged as equitable and challenging of all students only if a certain percentage of its graduating seniors take the AP or IB (International Baccalaureate) exams, is responsible for much of the current trend toward "acceleration" in public high schools. Published yearly in *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek* since 1998, the Challenge Index measures neither test scores nor course grades, and doesn't purport to measure such intangible factors as commitment, engagement, or happiness. Mathews (1998a) writes:

> To create the index for a given group of schools, I calculated the number of AP or IB tests given at each school, then divided the number of students in the June graduating class, so that big schools would not have an advantage over small ones…Having derived an index number for each school, I gave each school a rank. (n.p.)

Mathews agrees that the Challenge Index is a "narrow measure" (in Rotherham & Mead, 2006, p. 16), but responds: "That to my mind is one of its greatest strengths. Its

narrowness and simplicity means that readers can easily see what I am doing and judge for themselves if it makes sense to them." Yet even the most discerning readers may be confused by the *Newsweek* headlines introducing the Challenge Index as a list of "America's Top Public High Schools" and "The 100 Best High Schools in America" (Rotherham & Mead, 2007). Readers may believe that the schools ranked the "top" and the "best" schools in the country on the Challenge Index excel in areas beyond how many AP and IB tests their *graduating* students have taken in a given school year. (Mathews does not calculate students who do not graduate with their class, or leave school, as being members of the senior class.) Although Rotherham and Mead (2006) concur that the Challenge Index "measures exactly what it purports to" (p. 6), they also assert:

> The current *Newsweek* approach gives readers the wrong impression about the overall achievement of these schools. These schools score highly on one very narrow measure that ignores many other important aspects of school quality. At the very least, *Newsweek* should change the language surrounding the release of the list to make it clear what these 100 high schools are actually best in: having students take AP and IB exams. (p. 6)

It is difficult to imagine that the Challenge Index would have become as revered and pervasive were it titled: The American Public High Schools Whose Students Take the Most AP and IB Exams. Mathews responds to his critics that the use of more "sophisticated measures [to rank schools]…would leave the reader lost in a statistical jungle" (in Rotherham & Mead, 2006, p. 12). His concern for his "lost" reader, extends to his defense of the word "best" to describe the schools on his index:

> But consider how we use that adjective in America. We argue about it a great deal and have learned that each "best" is different, depending on what measures we prefer. If we are talking about movie directors, for instance, my "best" may be the one whose movies sold the most tickets. Yours may be the one who won the most Oscars. (in Rotherham & Mead, 2006, p. 12)

He offers the movie analogy on more than one occasion: “Your best movie may have won the most awards; mine may have sold the most tickets” (Mathews, 2007, n.p.). What movie fan names a favorite director or best film based on ticket sales, or even Oscar wins? We tend to choose favorites based on how a film resonates with our lives and experiences, on a beloved actor’s performance, on the depth and believability of the writing, on the complexity of the characters, on the film’s ability to open new vistas or offer new perspectives, or simply on its effectiveness in providing a two-hour escape from reality, or a whole lot of laughs. The directors and movies we love the best, like the schools we respect the most, are not so simply “indexed” by dividing one easily obtained number by another easily obtained number. Divide the number of AP and IB exams students take at a public high school, by the number of graduating seniors, and learn how many exams the school gave that year, period.

Mathews (2007) asserts that the AP/IB test participation rate indicates “which schools [are] the most demanding and supportive of all students” (p. 2). In what realm might the number of standardized test booklets that a family pays for, and a school sends to the College Board for scoring, determine how “demanding” and “supportive” a school is of “all students”? How “demanding and supportive” were the schools of those seniors who did not graduate in a given year? The school may “demand” that all students enrolled in AP courses sit for the College Board exams, and the schools may (or may not) “support” this edict by defraying the costs of tests, but that is not what Mathews means.

Mathews (2008b) also states that AP and IB exam scores are “public documents” (p. 2) that allow “anyone [to] see (as long as all or nearly all AP and IB students take the exams) how well a student is doing when measured against an incorruptible high

standard" (Mathews, 2008b, p. 2). Do the College Board exams present standards so "incorruptible" and so "high" that scores are irrelevant? Just sitting for the exam, according to Mathews, is measurement enough. Mathews must be aware that students do not have to take the course in order to take the exam. Are we to infer that since the College Board's exams-as-public-documents present an "incorruptible high standard," whatever assessments or "private documents" a teacher may devise on her own measure standards that are corruptible and low? Finally, what "incorruptible high standard" does The Challenge Index offer to its readers?

Catching Up

After calculating The Challenge Index for 2008, Mathews discovered that the school he had ranked number one in the entire Washington, DC metropolitan area, Coolidge High School in the District, had a mere two percent passing rate on the impressive 750 AP tests taken by its 137 graduating seniors in 2007. Mathews (2008b) confesses upon seeing the Coolidge passing rate, "I knew I was in trouble" (p. 1). His reaction was neither to recant his practice of ranking schools based on his simplistic and misleading formula, nor to offer an apology to the 98% of the AP test-takers and their teachers at Coolidge who experienced failure, but instead to create a new index: "the Catching Up list. It includes all schools with AP or IB test passing rates below 10 percent" (2008b, p. 4):

> If I left [Coolidge High School] high on the same list with schools that had already gone through the process, it would create confusion about what the list was measuring. It would leave the false impression that Coolidge officials were trying to involve students in AP as a gimmick to look good in *The Post* and *Newsweek*, when in fact they were trying to construct the foundation of a challenging academic culture. (p. 3)

What "confusion" would Coolidge's number one ranking create for readers who, not "lost in a statistical jungle" (Mathews, in Rotherham & Mead, 2006, p. 12), understand that the Challenge Index measures the number of AP and IB exams taken by graduating seniors at a school in one year? What "false impression" could Coolidge's rapid "advanced placement" on the Challenge Index leave? Ranking schools by number of tests only is the most glaring gimmick, and a return to the etymological root of the word *challenge* as trickery, artifice, and misrepresentation (*OED Online*, 1989/2008).

In response to a principal who remarked that Mathews' two lists "reminded him of Plessy v. Ferguson, the 1896 US Supreme Court decision that endorsed allegedly separate-but-equal school segregation" (in Mathews, 2008b, p. 4), Mathews (2008b) offers this analogy: "Professional soccer teams in Europe move from lower to higher leagues when they complete successful seasons. The same rules apply here" (p. 5). The soccer analogy, however, falls far short of its intended goal. The same rules do not apply here. In the game of soccer, the winner is determined by which team scores the most goals in a game; not by how many games a team plays, how many players each team has on its roster, or which teams score at least 10 percent of their attempted shots, or win 10 percent of their games. If Jay Mathews wants his Challenge Index to be analogous to the division system in European soccer, then he will need to rank the schools by test scores on one list, not by the number of tests submitted for grading on two separate lists.

Whether he likes it or not, that Coolidge High School wound up as number one on the 2008 Challenge Index is Jay Mathews' success. I agree with Mathews' (2008b) denial that the Challenge Index could be "an invitation to unscrupulous principals to stuff students into AP and create a false aura of academic success" (p. 3), as it is an invitation

to *all* school leaders, with and without scruples. Those of us who work in schools will admit that we, and/or our administrators, are nothing if not compliant. If we are being measured by how many AP and IB exams we give to our graduating seniors, then we will see to it that our graduating seniors will take as many AP and IB exams as possible. And it is not only the "unscrupulous" among us who comply; in many cases, our very jobs, or at least our AP teaching assignments, are on the line. The six teacher-participants in this study, the three teachers in my initial explorations, and myself—ten of us total—would not "stuff" students into our AP classes to boost our schools' ranking on the Challenge Index, but we know it is happening in our schools, and we know that we will welcome and support all students in our classrooms, AP and otherwise, because that is who we are, as teachers and as human beings.

It may be important to note that just as "we teach who we are" (Palmer, 1998, p. 2), write who we are, and even research who we are, Mathews indexes who he is. I have come to discover that the Challenge Index emerged from three events in Jay Mathews' life. First, Mathews' son was not admitted to AP US History at Scarsdale High School in Westchester County, New York, because he failed to score high enough on the entrance test (Mathews, 1998a, n.p.). Mathews' frustration and subsequent public action are understandable, and perhaps even commendable. Students who want to take AP courses should be allowed and encouraged to take them. The second event in Mathews' life, his dissatisfaction with his job as a *Washington Post* reporter covering Wall Street, tracking the Dow and the Standard & Poor's, led to his decision "to create [his] own index to measure something [he] thought was more important—which schools were giving their students the most value" (Mathews, 2007, p. 2). Mathews' creation of the Challenge

Index de-values the notion of what constitutes a "good school" by reducing complex pedagogical relationships and other important educational factors into an index based upon a single simplistic variable. Third, Mathews first devised and published the Challenge Index to "draw attention" (2008a, p. 1) to his book, *Class Struggle: What's Wrong (and Right) with America's Best Public High Schools* (1998b). We cannot fault Mathews for wanting to promote his book. Mathews writes of the Challenge Index, "The list is journalism, not scholarship" (in Rotherham & Mead, 2006, p. 17). The list may be journalism, but it is also the chip on a disappointed father's shoulder, a shrewd public relations ploy to sell a book, (and later to sell *Newsweeks* and *Washington Posts)*; and overall quite damaging to the integrity of autonomous and authentic teaching and learning in the public high schools that cannot afford to opt out.

Opting Out

Four days before Mathews published his announcement of the first Catching Up List (Mathews, 2008), this headline ran in *The New York Times*: "Scarsdale Adjusts to Life Without Advanced Placement Courses" (Hu, 2008, p. 1). In an ironic twist, Scarsdale High School, where Mathews' son was denied admission to AP US History some years before, decided to opt out of offering Advanced Placement courses beginning with the 2007-2008 school year (Scharfenberg, 2007). The affluent Westchester County suburban high school, joined "a handful of exclusive private schools including Ethical Culture Fieldston, Dalton, and Calhoun in New York City" (Hu, 2008, p. 2) that stopped offering AP courses. In 2002, Fieldston became the first elite independent school to publicly announce its decision to abolish their AP program. According to Principal Rachel Friis Stettler, "Ambitious students felt compelled to choose the [AP] classes over

courses designed by [Fieldston's] own faculty, like the physics of sound and Chinese history" (Zhao, 2002, p. 1). Fieldston's decision to drop AP and favor courses designed by its own teachers, a program dubbed Advanced Topics (AT), demonstrates a deeper understanding of what it means to teach, to let-learn, and to trust high school teachers to teach the high school students in their communities. Despite initial concern among some parents that the lack of AP courses on their children's transcripts would hinder college acceptances, the admissions directors from both Harvard and Stanford supported Fieldston's turn from AP. Parental fears were allayed as Fieldston reported their "highest early acceptance rate" to college (Hu, 2008, p. 1) among their students after the first year of abolishing the program.

Following Fieldston's lead, albeit five years later, Scarsdale High School replaced its AP program with Advanced Topics (AT). Although Fieldston's decision was fueled in part by a desire to retain teachers' autonomy, Scarsdale is not quite as trusting of its teachers to design "sophisticated and creative curriculum" (Hu, 2008, p. 1):

> Scarsdale has a set a precedent for high-achieving public schools. It did so deliberately, investing $40,000.00 to bring in 25 professors from Harvard, Yale, New York University, and other top colleges to help develop the Advanced Topics curriculum. (Hu, 2008, p. 2)

I cannot discern from the above statement what "to help develop" entails, but I wonder what precedent Scarsdale has set for public schools by spending $40,000.00 to continue to strip teachers of their opportunity to develop curriculum? I hope that the teachers of Scarsdale High School were the master designers of the new AT curriculum, and that the college professors were truly consultants. John Klemme, Scarsdale's principal states, "We have the luxury of being able to move beyond the AP…If people called [AP] a gold curriculum in the past, I refer to this [AT] version as the platinum

curriculum" (Hu, 2008, p. 2). Couched in terms of the affluent—luxury, gold, and platinum—Scarsdale's move from AP to AT sounds more like an advertisement for Rolex watches than a pedagogical orientation or way-of-being-with children in the classroom. Just as Tina observes, "The College Board doesn't know my kids and where they are," how well do the university professors know the children of Scarsdale High School and where they are? How pedagogically attuned Scarsdale might have been had it en-trusted the creation of the AT high school curricula to their own high school teachers for their own high school students.

Many of the particular locales from which the Advanced Placement program first emerged, "the highly visible prep schools" (Foster, 1989, p. 3) on the east coast, no longer offer Advanced Placement courses. The non-profit organization, Excellence Without AP, currently lists 62 schools, from the elite Phillips Exeter Academy and Germantown Friends School to the public (and also elite) Hanover High School in New Hampshire, who have joined a growing trend, among the privileged few, to move away from the College Board's Advanced Placement program (Hammond, 2008) and closer to home. "Passion for learning begins with the teacher," according to Excellence Without AP's website:

> When a teacher designs a course, learning is a voyage of joint discovery rather than an effort to cover topics by an unseen authority. In locally-designed courses, teacher and student can share ownership of the learning process to an extent that is impossible with a standardized curriculum. (Hammond, n.p., 2008)

Can a standardized curriculum, or a course whose content is in-part determined by a standardized final assessment, still be a "voyage of joint discovery"? Is it possible for passionate, committed teachers to ignite passion in their students through course content not entirely of their own making? In addition to "A Teacher-Designed Curriculum," the

organization offers as reasons for "moving beyond AP," the desire to create: a mission-driven curriculum, a more hands-on curriculum, a more inclusive classroom, a thematic or interdisciplinary curriculum, and extended off-campus projects (Hammond, 2008). Is AP the "best possible way to fulfill [a school's] mission"? The schools on Hammond's list, not a ranking but an alphabetized list of schools united by a common belief system, have a luxury that many of us cannot afford at this time. Most of our public schools can only dream of reaching Scarsdale's platinum standard, in financial or intellectual terms. Our school systems may have the financial resources, and our teachers and students certainly have the intellectual capacity and desire to make autonomous pedagogical decisions, but we are beholden to what is administratively convenient, simply quantified, and easily ranked. Do we need Jay Mathews' Challenge Index to determine what is "best" for our teaching, learning, and being-with students in our local classrooms? Let the healing begin.

Healing the Damage Index

Mathews may defend the use of "best" as an adjective to describe the schools on his Challenge Index, but how might he respond to the term "Jay Mathews" as an adjective? "I hate to be Jay Mathews about this," teacher-participant James, a.k.a. Mr. Disclaimer, prefaces his remarks in one of our conversations. I understand the short hand, as he proceeds to explain how in one year, the number of AP Lit sections at his school increased from four to seven, without a significant increase in the overall size of the senior class (population: 482). "Jay Mathews" as an adjective describes the inclination to channel, sometimes force, students into AP classes, regardless of aptitude, interest, or scheduling concerns. "Jay Mathews" as an adjective also describes a general over-

reliance on easy numbers to quantify, then judge, complex pedagogical relationships and experiences in AP classrooms. James welcomes all of his students in his AP classes, but admits being "a little annoyed by the whole thing."

What is "the whole thing" to which James refers? Is it the bloating of AP participation to include less able and interested students who are increasingly more often coerced than invited? According to James, the AP population swell "is going to come back to our doorstep. You know, 'Hey look, last year you had such and such average score. This year you have this.'" Although James is not, and does not yet have a reason to be, overly focused on test scores, he anticipates a not-too-distant future when increased enrollment may inevitably bring scores down, and necessitate more raw test preparation, and less frequent exposure to authentic literary experiences outside the realm of the exam. James recalls: "I do remember there almost being two classes at one point. There was a group that really could have run, and they weren't running."

James' reference to running brings to mind the concept of *currere,* the Latin term for "running the race course" (Kincheloe, 1998, p. 129), and the root word of the concept of curriculum as reflecting "a holistic life experience, the journey of becoming a self-aware subject capable of shaping his or her life path" (Kincheloe, 1998, p. 130). What is it like to run-the-race or journey with a "tour group" whose members travel at widely varying speeds? What is like, in the AP English classroom, to walk, when you want to run; crawl when you want to walk; stand still when you want to move? What is the experience of letting-learn with an ever-widening range of student interest, ability, and effort levels?

I hear the chorus of Odetta's folk song, "Keep On Movin' It On": "If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl. Any way you can make it baby, you keep on moving it on" (Gordon, 2005, track 12). Odetta's words inspired generations to overcome, to stand up for what they believed in, to keep on keepin' on in the face of prejudice, adversity, and injustice. But in the thing itself that is the teaching of AP English in public schools, what are we encouraging when we propel our students to "keep on movin' it on"? To crawl when they cannot walk? Do we all need to be headed in the same direction at the same pace on the same path in the same time frame? Are we unnecessarily oppressing students with our stopwatches and our scantrons? As caring and warm and welcoming as we may be to the students in our classrooms, regardless of interest and ability, is herding all high school juniors and seniors into alleged college-level courses in their best interest? Are we making students who would run, or even fly, in honors English 12, crawl on all fours in AP Lit? Are we clipping the wings of AP students who are ready to soar with Woolf and Faulkner, so those on their hands and knees have a prayer of keeping up? Are we merely "keeping up appearances" and giving in to the tyrannical dictates of Mathews' Challenge Index? By funneling students into AP, are we denying them the opportunity to "keep on movin' it on" at their own pace, in their own good time?

Amanda, like James, welcomes all students to her classes, but is aware of the increasing emergence of two AP "tracks," as class sizes increase and students enter with a broader array of disparities:

> They like to encourage the kids to challenge themselves, but when you have that many kids in an AP class, there's such a range that you have to sort of water down some of the material. I hate to do that. It's not that I

> want to exclude the kids who aren't prepared, but maybe there should be almost two tiers of it or something. I'm not sure, but at this point it's frustrating to see the huge range because you don't really feel like you're satisfying anybody completely. (Amanda)

What is it like to teach with the feeling that you're not satisfying anybody, neither the students nor yourself? Is the experience of the bifurcated AP class reminiscent of Mathews' Challenge Index and Catching Up List? Amy, as the only teacher-participant who teaches the traditional junior course, AP Language, to seniors using the AP Lit reading list, already experiences having the "lower tier" of AP students in her classes. The majority of her students, however, are strong in math and science, but shy away from AP courses in the humanities, particularly English. For many, English is not their first language. Having the "second string" of AP works for Amy and her students, as she is their coach and cheerleader, bolstering confidence and motivation:

> For this class, I tell them, my job is to prepare you for college-level writing, college-level assignments, and more responsibility. The onus is on you, as opposed to me. You really have to want this, and you really have to pick up the slack, or else you're not going to see the results…Some of them are just mired in the, "I'll never be able to," or "I don't want to," or "You're just being hard on me." But some say, "Okay, I want to try to meet this level," and they do really well.

As I write in Chapter Four, confidence-building and passion-building are integral components of the lived experience of teaching AP English in public school, but the students in Amy's class have not been institutionally pushed as seniors to take AP Language. Rather, they have been encouraged by their junior English teachers, who know them well, as having the ability and maturity level to face the real challenges of AP English in the twelfth grade. Some students may have been pushed by their parents; however, those tend to be the students who accuse Amy of being too hard on them, who

may feel in-peril rather than em-powered by being advanced to a place-ment where they are not-yet.

Under the Falling Sky

I was at a junior class meeting at my school recently when the English department chairperson announced to the 500 eleventh graders in attendance, that their choices for English for their senior year were AP Lit, AP Language, and on-level English. She didn't say it aloud, but the students quickly figured it out: Honors English 12 had been abolished. The audience booed. One girl shouted, "What if you don't like English?" The chairperson explained that since most of the students were college bound, then they should take college-level English. To which the same girl yelled, "What if you don't want to take AP?" The assistant principal took the microphone and added, "You don't have to take AP English. You can take on-level English." It sounded like punishment. The audience cheered. What message are we sending to our students when we narrow their choices to Advanced Placement, or on-level English, a course which has become synonymous in my school with remedial? Are our offers really choices at all? Tina sums up the most recent trend of ratcheted up AP participation and AP test score obsession: "It's like Henny Penny." Is the sky falling? Whose sky? Over whom? Under what shelter might we "duck and cover"?

Teacher-conversant Katherine suggests a return to admissions requirements in AP courses. She admits the irony of her stance, for as a high school senior in the same county where she now teaches (with a PhD in English), she was denied access to taking AP English because she received a B in junior English:

> In 1980, there was one section of AP English. Two of us went to the teacher and said, "We want to take your class." He did not know us, but he said, "Girls, you would get a C in my class, but you're going to get an A in that other class, so you need to go back and stay in the other class." Of course we did, because that's what you did then…I don't mind the kids who don't have the background in the class if they're really willing to do the work and they're interested.

None of us wants to return to 1980, for a variety of reasons. But to be willing to do the work and to be interested in AP English require that the students have some notion of what the work will involve, and what comprises at least part of the course content. When I began teaching AP English, pre-Challenge Index, the individual schools in my district had the autonomy to design their own entrance requirements for Advanced Placement courses. I gave a short multiple practice and a sample essay question after school for an initial exposure to the exam's content and format. If a student did not do well on the practice exam, and s/he still wanted to take the course, then s/he was in the course. Having an entrance requirement to show up after school to take the practice test, and to take the time to self-advocate if the scores were low, show a willingness and an informed commitment to what is billed as a college-level experience with literature and writing, or at the very least, the closest a student might come to a college-level experience in English class while in high school. Katherine, an open-enrollment advocate, still recommends a "gatekeeping interview":

> It wouldn't necessarily be, "What are your skills?" but it would be, "How willing are you to do this?" The other thing I think we need to watch out for is these kids who have so much going on that they can't do anything well. I would say, "Okay, you're signed up for four or five APs, let's pick two or three at the most," because the reality is if these were college classes they might be taking four at a time. They would only meet two or three days a week, and they would have many more flexible hours in the day to accommodate the workload and a social life.

Katherine's "gatekeeping interview" consists of two questions for prospective students: (1) How willing are you to do this?; (2) What else are you doing in your life? Assuming students know what "this" is, and that they are not overloaded with too many other AP courses in addition to extracurricular activities, including family responsibilities, sports, the arts, volunteer work, and paying jobs, perhaps Katherine's two questions along with a short practice test should be considered for admission to AP courses, in all subject areas. Katherine states: "I think we expect an awful lot of [high school students] when we allow them to take three or four or five AP classes." The more AP courses a student takes in a high school day, the more we simulate the traditional high school model, rather than the college experience, and the more unworkable and stress-ful the high school experience becomes. Is it possible to extend AP course participation in ways that would not exclude Jay Mathews' son, but would invite informed participants rather than coercing and unpleasantly surprising unsuspecting students who fear the falling sky?

Heads Up!

As inclusive and accepting as the teacher-participants are of the students whose names are on their rosters, who show up or don't show up—prepared or unprepared—for class each day, they still experience frustration with growing class sizes. In my conversations with teacher-participants and in reading their journal entries, I have determined that the majority of students in AP still come to class every day, prepared, motivated, and engaged. Still, some of the teachers note changes brought about by their schools' desire to earn a higher rank on Jay Mathews' Challenge Index.

Katherine, frustrated by the rise in what she calls, “This weird culture, where it’s okay to be a slacker, and it’s okay to not understand as long as everybody does, too,” devotes a journal entry to describing four categories of students currently in her AP classes. Her first group she calls, “The best of my students who are the ones who have a genuine interest in reading and writing.” Although they tend to do well on their report cards and on the test, not all of them earn fours and fives, “Some of them struggle with analysis and interpretation, but they all get something out of the class and enjoy it very much.” The second group she describes as young resume padders, “who are taking AP because they know it will look good on their transcripts.” These students tend to do well grade and score-wise, but “They are there to get through it, but not necessarily to ‘get it.’” The next group, Katherine names as “capable but intensely lazy and not at all interested in the material.” These students are probably the most resistant to class cohesion and community, as they “whine and complain every time I give a new reading or writing assignment.” The students in this third group may have been forced by their parents to take AP, and are increasingly being forced by their guidance counselors following administrative mandates to increase AP enrollment. These students are likely to whine and complain in lower levels of English, and perhaps in their other classes as well, but their presence in AP is especially damaging to the students ready to run, and also to those in Katherine’s fourth group:

> The last group (and the smallest) is the saddest group to me. These are students who are in AP because they want to be better students or whose parents forced them into AP, but they do not have the skills to be there...My heart breaks for these kids, and I do everything I can to work with them. But the fact is that you can only do so much in one year.

After my initial reading of Katherine’s journal entry, I appreciated the time she took to observe and record the range of students in her AP classes, but I felt

uncomfortable about including her assessment in my dissertation. There was a hint of a rubric mentality, of narrowly ranking the students, which made me uncomfortable. Still, I wanted to incorporate this aspect of Katherine's written expression of her lived experience. The categories, though not arbitrary, are somewhat fluid, and begin to put words to some of the joys and frustrations we encounter with our students' ways-of-being with-us in our classroom communities. What is it like to engage the four types of students in daily classroom conversations and interactions, while preparing them for a one-size-fits-all standardized assessment crafted by outsiders? For what balance might we strive as we live *E Pluribus Unum*, same team, from all the many pieces and orientations with which we dwell in the AP English classroom?

Lisa, a strong proponent of lifting all gatekeeping restrictions in AP, offers this more hope-ful assessment of her AP class composition:

> I think [all students] still learn more here. I really do. I think they benefit from being in an environment that is intellectually stimulating to them and gets them thinking about these things even if they're slightly over their heads sometimes. I think most of them do benefit from being around the content of the class and also the classmates, to be in that situation. I don't have the, "I put my head down" students. I have the, "I'm just not quite bright enough to really do this" students. If they were, "I put my head down and I don't pick up any of the books," then they're not getting anything out of the class, but that's not the students I have who are not doing well.

Lisa's "heads up" distinction gives a strong "thumbs up" to AP and the College Board, even as we announce at the end of a timed session: pencils down. As long as we can keep our students wide-awake to the world (Greene, 1978), in and beyond our classrooms, and on and beyond the test, we can work our magic with our students' terrific minds in the AP classroom-workshop. While we realize our students' and our own potential with real eyes, we can begin to see and to see a-new the passions and

possibilities offered by the College Board by way of the AP teachers who practice and hone the art and craft of teaching and testing, without reducing the pedagogical experience to narrowly defined expectations of what it means to teach-to-the-test. As we build confidence, courage, passion, and com-passion with our students in the AP English classroom, we live the message that to do well in AP English, perhaps in any AP course, or in any course beholden to standardized tests, one needs to "identify in." We, with our students, need to think the world together, to become a-part of the whole rather than standing a-part from, or simply falling a-part. Together, we can live the silver, the gold, and the platinum curriculum. When we, as James does, show students "different avenues to be successful," in class and on the exam, in healing and caring ways, we share possibilities for passing the test, surpassing the placement, and re-storing broken wholeness in the wide open spaces of the AP English classroom.

Restoring Broken Wholeness

> And so any text that may teach us something about the depthful character of our pedagogic nature is bound to aim for a certain hermeneutic: reaching for something beyond, restoring a forgotten or broken wholeness by recollecting something lost, past, or eroded, and by reconciling it in our experience of the present with a vision of what should be. (van Manen, 2003, p. 153)

I am nearing the end of my phenomenological journey to explore the lived experience of teaching AP English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing. My hope is that this phenomenological text "may teach us something about the depthful character of our pedagogic nature." Through the questioning, the conversing, the reflecting, the writing, and the re-writing, I reach for the parts, the whole, the forgotten, and the lost. Part of me wants to press the rewind button, re-trace my steps, and return to

my fifth period AP Lit class with Molly and Julia. I had fewer wrinkles and less grey hair, but vanity about my personal appearance is not the only reason.

I think I would answer the girls' questions now with heightened sensitivity, more confidence, and deeper wisdom. In my re-vision of the afternoon, when Molly asks if she should read the poem, "A Whippoorwill in the Woods" by Amy Clampitt, before reading the multiple choice questions that follow, rather than let my head fall to my desk with a dramatic thud, I respond ever so gently, "Yes, Molly, read the poem first, and then the questions. Let the questions help to guide your understanding of Clampitt's work." When Julia asks, "Are we really supposed to appreciate this stuff?" my answer is a calm, "Yes, Julia, let's look at line 25: 'We single out for notice/above all what's disjunct, the way birds are,' and line 30: 'an aunt of mine, a noticer/of such things before the noticing had or needed/ a name…' You, too, Julia, can 'single out for notice/above all what's disjunct'; you, too, can be 'a noticer/of such things.' Read the poem, then tell me what things you notice." She may have given me her teenage eyeroll-whatever face in reply, or she may have begun to appreciate "this stuff," but no matter her reaction, we have a conversation, the real "stuff" of teaching and learning. This is what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like, to think the world together, and to dwell aright in the Zone of Between in the AP English classroom.

How I miss my conversations with students about language, literature, and even the vagaries of the College Board exam. I borrow Tim O'Brien's (1990) words from his novel, *The Things They Carried*, that I also share in Chapter Two of this dissertation:

> It's time to be blunt. I'm forty-three years old, true, and I'm a writer now, and a long time ago I walked through Quang Ngai Province as a foot soldier…Almost everything else is invented. (O'Brien, 1990, pp. 179)

This is the point in the novel where, as I also write in Chapter Two, my students grow angry and accuse of O'Brien of lying. But it's time for me to be blunt: I have not taught AP English since completing Chapter Three. (But almost everything else is certainly not invented.) I mention earlier in this chapter, that I write in "slow craft time," and I was slow enough to make a slight career change during the course of writing my dissertation. As I put the finishing touches on Chapter Three, and made the transition from public high school teacher to phenomenological curriculum researcher through the conversation process, I was offered a position in my school to run a new small learning community, the Ulysses Signature Program.

In the county where I teach, each high school has an autonomous Signature Program, a concept similar to a magnet program, except that we are open-enrollment to the students who live in our cluster area; we do not exert the magnetic pull from other high schools and we do not have strict guidelines for admission. I am happy to report that I am still very much a teacher, in the classroom every day with students, but instead of teaching English, I teach research classes to Ulysses juniors and seniors working on independent research projects. The irony, of course, is that I was tapped for the new position in large part due to my doctoral studies at the University of Maryland, as the heart of the Ulysses Signature Program is guiding students to develop their strongest passions into multi-dimensional academic research projects. Many of the students in the program take AP courses, too, so I am also pleased that my work still takes me into AP classrooms, particularly AP English classrooms, throughout the school day.

If I thought AP English was the teaching of my dreams, and it was the *English* teaching of my dreams—coordinating and teaching in the Ulysses Signature Program is

nirvana. As far as I have come in my phenomenological journey to know, to name, and to appreciate the "stuff" of Advanced Placement English, through the lived experience of its practitioners, its course content, and even the College Board exams, I am no longer beholden to the College Board or to external standardization of any kind. The Ulysses Signature Program is a local mom and pop shop, with an emphasis on mom. In a few short years, the program has grown from 22 sophomores, to over 300 students in four grades, and we could be larger if I thought it were a good idea. (I don't.) We do not offer cookie cutter lessons, "teacher-proof" scripts, or gimmicks or fads of any kind. We are not ranked on anyone's index. Instead, we are a core group of ten teachers from the history, English, and science departments who teach who we are, from what we have come to know about teaching and learning with our students and their families in our local community. We subscribe to Heidegger's (1993b) notion of teaching as letting-learn and Ellsworth's (1997) pronouncement that good teaching is giving what we do not have. As students dig deep within themselves to turn passions into projects, we teachers find ourselves guiding students through fashion, fishing, and photography—sometimes familiar, but more often unfamiliar, terrain. Although I inherited the name from the program's founding architects, Ulysses is a fitting namesake for our endeavors in the program, and for my closing thoughts on the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement English in public school.

Ulysses Come Home

The Odyssey, as told by Homer, is the epic journey of Odysseus (in Greek, Ulysses in Latin), returning home to Ithaca after fighting in the Trojan War. Amid "lures and dangers" (Casey, 1993, p. 278), from Cyclops to Sirens, Odysseus stays the

meandering course, eventually making it back to home-place, Ithaca, and to home-girl, wife Penelope. Casey (1993) writes:

> 'Home is where one starts from,' and it is also where one returns to in a journey of homecoming. In between, life's journey offers a set of scenes as place-rich and place-varied as Odysseus experienced in his eventful circumnavigation of the Mediterranean world. (p. 274)

In the Ulysses Signature Program, we use the metaphor of the odyssey as a guide to circumnavigate the tortuous course in the "rhizomatic multiplicities" (Casey, 1993, p. 276) of our individual and collective research journeys. As we honor process, progress, and product throughout the four years that we work with our students in the "place-rich and place-varied" program, we are attuned to our students' growth and ever-widening wealth of possibilities in our silver, gold, and platinum home-grown curriculum and pathways. Though the students in the program still have to pass our school system's county exams, Maryland's High School Assessments, and are expected to score high on the SATs and AP exams, we do not focus on test preparation. An open-enrollment program whose culmination is an independent senior research project tends to attract students who are already proficient in "doing school" in its myriad forms and expectations. The students who select, or whose parents select, the four-year Ulysses Program, tend to already know how to take standardized tests, liberating us to focus on formulating questions, exploring passions, and beginning to satisfy curiosities in and among the subject areas we address: English, history, and science.

The word *Odyssey* is synonymous with "a long adventurous journey" (*OED Online* 1989/2008), while the word *nostalgia* literally means "return home" in ancient Greek (*OED Online* 1989/2008). I am nostalgic for my afternoon with Molly and Julia, for my earliest days of AP English teaching, for my younger years when I was a wrinkle-

free brunette. And I can't help but discern a scent of nostalgia in the air at my school's twice yearly Ulysses Fair, where the graduating seniors share their independent research projects exhibition-style in the auditorium. As parents, teachers, mentors, and other adults wander from exhibit to exhibit, seeing, touching, and listening to the shared passions of high school students, we re-call school as it once-was in its idealized form, as we think it should it be, as we know it can still-be in tiny corners of the lifeworld. We return-home to school, to learning, and to being-with students-as-children in community, their community, our community, without the unwelcome intrusions of nameless strangers who do not know us and who answer to such corporate, anonymous names as College Board.

While walking to our cars after a finishing a conversation session, teacher-participant James asked me what I would offer instead of AP English and the College Board exam. I didn't have a good response at the time, other than I thought we had better, more meaningful and imaginative options than one three-hour standardized test in May. A few days later, I posed James' question to teacher-participant Tina, and her response was:

> I think it would be the same course, but we would have more time for research and more time for projects. We could learn different critical angles, like Marxism, and segue into all the political approaches and we could explore different realms and do papers on them, and projects on them.

An inquiry-based project approach, whether the final "products" took the form of traditional research papers or more alternative forms of expression, is preferable to one three-hour standardized test. Tina is confident, and I am confident that the course and assessments we devise for our students, on our own, with other teachers, and even with $40,000 worth of college professor consultants, could equal or surpass the College Board

exam. But we both agree that until we trust teachers, we will continue to be constrained and defined by the dictates of the corporate testing culture.

Seeking a Newer World

Dr. Simmons tells us that "A school ought to be a magical place" where students "come to understand what [their lives] can be" (in Frey, 2001, p. C1). She goes on to say that a school should not be "a place where you go to study for a standardized test" (in Frey, 2001, p. C1). We may infer that, according to Dr. Simmons, school cannot be both "a magical place" and a place to study for a standardized test. But for now, from my inquiry into the lived experience of teaching AP English in public high school, perhaps if we "think the world together" (Palmer, 1998, p. 2), we can dwell with our students in our classrooms and develop our terrific minds to our full potential *and* prepare for a standardized test. Until we get to the place where testing is not confused with teaching, where student achievement is not narrowly determined by standardized test scores only, we would be wise to follow Ms. M's lead from my early explorations brought forth in Chapter Two: "The system is not going to change, so I choose to be joyful."

If we choose to be joyful, even when the meaningless dictates of external measures like the Challenge Index and NCLB are finding ways into our classrooms, even when as Ms. L says in Chapter Two, "I love the material, but hate the test," or Tina tells us in Chapter Four that teaching to the test, "goes against my joy of teaching the class," we can open wide the spaces of passions and possibilities, embrace the stanzas and the scantrons, and dwell aright in the Zone of Between in the AP English classroom, and all public school classrooms whose process, progress, and pedagogical complexities are ignored, oversimplified by the emphasis on standardized testing.

Van Manen (2003) writes: “We must always ask: how can we invent in the text a certain space, a perspective wherein the pedagogic voice which speaks for children can let itself be heard?” (p. 153). It is my hope that through the pedagogic voices of the teachers in this study, I have invented in the text a certain space which speaks for the children, high school children, who have the right to come to school, to high school, and explore high school courses as high school students, and discover “what [they] can accomplish as human being[s]” in the literary arts and their other subjects of study in and beyond the classroom through curriculum as plan, and curriculum as lived.

Maxine Greene (1995) states: “I am forever on the way” (p. 1). I, too, am forever on the way. As I write the closing sentences in the final paragraph of this dissertation, I wonder about next-steps on the way. I wonder where AP takes students on their journeys after they leave high school. I wonder if the students who earn high enough scores on their AP exams find their way to more advanced literature courses in college, or if they have “succeeded” in getting English requirements out-of-the-way. I wonder if the students who are truly coerced rather than invited into AP courses, come into the light of passionate engagement with thinking and living literature in new ways. And I wonder about the teachers. Since completing my dissertation, half of the teachers in my study and initial explorations, five out of ten, including myself, no longer teach AP English. For a variety of reasons—change in marital status, promotion to central office, illness, new motherhood, transfer to private school—AP teaching seems to be an early casualty of significant life changes. Though we all have our version of how teaching AP English is the teaching of our dreams that saved our careers, or gets us out of bed in the morning, it is often the first to go when we have more pressing demands on our time, when life takes

us to places where we are consumed by other matters: familial, financial, pedagogical, personal. The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson writes in the voice of the re-tired warrior Ulysses reflecting on his career, “Come, my friends,/‘Tis not too late to seek a newer world” (in Perrine & Arp, 1956/1992, p. 92). Come, let us seek a newer world, in our teaching and in our testing, in our passions and possibilities, in the lived experience of teaching Advanced Placement English in public high school.

APPENDIX A: "A WHIPPOORWILL IN THE WOODS"

Questions 41-55. Read the following poem carefully before you choose your answers.

A Whippoorwill in the Woods

Night after night, it was very nearly enough,
they said, to drive you crazy: a whippoorwill
in the woods repeating itself like the stuck groove
of an LP with a defect, and no way possible
of turning the thing off.

And night after night, they said, in the insomniac
small hours the whipsawing voice of obsession
would have come in closer, the way a sick
thing does when it's done for—or maybe the reason
was nothing more melodramatic

than a night-flying congregation of moths, lured in
in their turn by house-glow, the strange heat
of it—imagine the nebular dangerousness, if one
were a moth, the dark pockmarked with beaks, the great
dim shapes, the bright extinction—

if moths are indeed, after all, what a whippoorwill
favors. Who knows? Anyhow, from one point of view
insects are to be seen as an ailment, moths above all:
the filmed-over, innumerable nodes of spun-out tissue
untidying the trees, the larval

spew of such hairy hordes, one wonders what use
they can be other than as a guarantee no bird
goes hungry. We're like that. The webbiness,
the gregariousness of the many are what we can't abide.
We single out for notice

above all what's disjunct, the way birds are,
with their unhooked-up, cheekily anarchic
dartings and flashings, their uncalled-for color—
the indelible look of the rose-breasted grosbeak
an aunt of mine, a noticer

of such things before the noticing had or needed
a name, drew my five-year-old attention up to, in
the green deeps of a maple. She never married,
believed her cat had learned to leave birds alone,
and for years, node after node,

by lingering degrees she made way within for
what wasn't so much a thing as it was a system,
a webwork of error that throve until it killed her.
What is health? We must all die sometime.
Whatever it is out there

in the woods, that begins to seem like
a species of madness, we survive as we can:
the hooked-up, the humdrum, the brief, tragic
wonder of being at all. The whippoorwill out in
the woods, for me, brought back

Line (5) (10) (15) (20) (25) (30) (35) (40) (45)

as by a relay, from a place at such a distance
no recollection now in place could reach so far,
the memory of a memory she told me of once:
of how her father, my grandfather, by whatever
(50) now unfathomable happenstance,

carried her (she might have been five) into the breathing night.
"Listen!" she said he'd said. "Did you hear it?
That was a whippoorwill." And she (and I) never forgot.

41. In the first stanza, the whippoorwill is presented chiefly as

(A) a kind of poet
(B) a symbol of death
(C) an emblem of freedom
(D) an annoyance
(E) a messenger

42. The whippoorwill is most probably called a "voice of obsession" (line 7) because it

(A) has a shrill cry
(B) repeats itself
(C) is invisible
(D) constantly tries to come nearer
(E) is probably sick

43. How many reasons does the speaker give to try to explain why the whippoorwill "would have come in closer" (line 8)?

(A) One
(B) Two
(C) Three
(D) Four
(E) Five

44. The speaker hypothesizes that moths might be

(A) bent on self-destruction
(B) dangerous to whippoorwills
(C) more like human beings than whippoorwills are
(D) heroic actors in a tragic drama
(E) food for whippoorwills

45. The diction used to describe moths in lines 19-21 suggests that

(A) science is slowly beginning to understand certain mysteries
(B) the speaker finds some aspects of nature alien to her
(C) nature is able to provide a truly tragic spectacle
(D) nature is governed by a higher power
(E) the beauty of nature is a source of comfort to the speaker

46. In line 26, "what's disjunct" refers to something that

(A) cannot be seen by most observers
(B) stands outside the purely natural world
(C) is broken and fragmented
(D) faces a constant threat of extinction
(E) is not incorporated in a larger entity

47. The object of "to" in line 32 is

(A) "look" (line 29)
(B) "aunt" (line 30)
(C) "things" (line 31)
(D) "name" (line 32)
(E) "deeps" (line 33)

48. For the speaker, the rose-breasted grosbeak and the whippoorwill are similar in that they both

(A) have the ability to disturb people's sleep
(B) feed principally on moths
(C) stand out as individuals amid their surroundings
(D) symbolize the individuality of the speaker
(E) are natural creatures that seem to violate the laws of nature

49. In line 34, the speaker implies that the aunt

(A) had lived most of her life fearing natural disaster
(B) was curious about scientific information that dealt with nature
(C) understood nature better than the speaker
(D) preferred not to face certain realities about nature
(E) was largely indifferent to her natural surroundings

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE

50. In line 38, the cause of the aunt's death is described in language most similar to that used by the speaker to describe

(A) cats
(B) birds
(C) moths
(D) the whippoorwill
(E) the grandfather

51. In the poem as a whole, the speaker views nature as being essentially

(A) inspiring
(B) comforting
(C) unfathomable
(D) vicious
(E) benign

52. The speaker makes a categorical assertion at all of the following places in the poem EXCEPT

(A) lines 1-2
(B) lines 17-18
(C) lines 23-24
(D) lines 25-26
(E) lines 40-43

53. Which of the following lines contains an example of personification?

(A) Line 33
(B) Line 39
(C) Line 43
(D) Line 48
(E) Line 51

54. Lines 44-53 have all of the following functions EXCEPT to

(A) return to the initial subject of the poem
(B) illustrate the influence of childhood experience
(C) link the present to the past
(D) emphasize the chaotic quality of natural events
(E) evoke a family relationship

55. The grandfather's words (lines 52-53) convey a sense of

(A) regret
(B) awe
(C) tragedy
(D) hope
(E) danger

END OF SECTION I

IF YOU FINISH BEFORE TIME IS CALLED, YOU MAY CHECK YOUR WORK ON THIS SECTION.

DO NOT GO ON TO SECTION II UNTIL YOU ARE TOLD TO DO SO.

APPENDIX B: PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Krupin's smells right: pickles and salami and lox and onion bagels. It sounds right: forks and knives clanking on plates, piles of dirty dishes dumped into tubs by harried waiters. Phones ringing, the deep permanence of the wall phone; the more fleeting shrillness of diners' cell phones. And the talk: the loud conversations of people more concerned with telling each personal story in excruciating detail than with interrupting and talking over others. The laughter: Jewish people telling jokes that only they think are funny.

But Krupin's doesn't look quite right. Yes, the shriveled salamis hang in a row from the ceiling, the beef tongue sweats in the deli case alongside the belly sliced chubs, the paunchy owners survey the dining room holding stacks of menus, anxious to boot customers lingering too long over that third cup of coffee. But this is upper Wisconsin Avenue, Washington, DC, not a strip mall off Sunrise Highway or prewar storefront on the Lower Eastside; this is not New York, it's Washington and it shows.

It's too clean, it's diplomatic and congressional, and just-passing-through with the current administration. It's John McLaughlin and Wolf Blitzer and Kokie Roberts. It's clear picture windows, a white drop ceiling, wall-to-wall-carpet, and space. So much space; the tables aren't crammed together; you don't feel like you're sitting on the laps of the party at the next table. It looks like I'm in a newly finished rec. room in the outer suburbs.

There's always a line when we get there. Even if we all manage to meet by the predetermined 9:50 am to beat the 10:00 Sunday morning rush, we wait in line with a good view of the tropical fish tank. We invariably are not paying attention when the owner, Mel, finally finds us a table and barks, "What do you wanna do? You wanna eat breakfast or you wanna watch the fish?" We laugh and follow him to our table, on the way I see a group sharing a large platter of every smoked fish I've ever known: lox, sable, whitefish, sturgeon. I make the mistake of asking Mel, "What is that called?" He's annoyed, "What?" "That platter there," I point, "with all the fish on it." He doesn't look at me when he answers gruffly, "The fish platter." I know not to ask anymore about it.

When I am seated at my table at Krupin's, I am Jewish again. I am the Manhattan-born, Queens-bred daughter of first generation Eastern European immigrants. I am not the upper middle class shiksa-wannabe who married a goyishe Connecticut blue blood. I can order without looking at the menu, but I look every time anyway. It's a virtual text of my own life story: chopped liver, pickled herring, chicken in the pot, borscht, matzoh ball soup. But it's Sunday brunch in Washington, DC; not my Aunt Sallie's duplex in the Bronx, or my Grandma's two bedroom high-rise apartment off Queens Boulevard. Still, I order like the good Jewish daughter I was raised to be: whitefish salad on a lightly toasted onion bagel, a plain bagel and cream cheese for my son, and my husband is on his own. I have taught him well, I think, as he orders cheese blintzes and knows enough to order nova rather than the too salty lox.

A waiter might remember to come back to refill our coffee or our water glasses, while we wait longer for our food than we would at any other restaurant. Chances are the waiter will forget, we will get his attention, he'll give us the sign that he's on his way, but he'll forget again. He'll bring our food and not care to remember who ordered what. If he brings the whitefish whole instead of the whitefish salad, I will send it back, and he will

be irritated. All of our bagels will come in one basket, and perhaps we're one short or he's forgotten to toast them. We asked for milk instead of cream for our coffee, but it never arrives. He'll clear plates before we've finished eating.

We don't mind the poor service; in fact, we wouldn't have it any other way. It gives us more fodder for jokes, more shared experiences, for our friends are here too. Most of them with New York Jewish or Philadelphia roots through their parents, and also like me they grew up in the hinterlands; we are the diaspora of Omaha, Grand Rapids, Santa Barbara, Ithaca. We have married outside the faith. We have chosen to live among the more dominant and less embarrassing, quieter culture of our partners. We moved here from other places after college and worked our first jobs together, almost all of us began our adult lives through what we thought were careers at the National Geographic Society. Only two of us remain, the rest of us have gone on to other professions with other societies. Yet here is where we often gather, as we have since before we married and started families of our own.

Krupin's smells right, sounds right, and tastes right. The nova is thinly sliced, fresh and soft, "like buttuh" as Linda Richman would say. The whitefish is smoked, not too sweet, laced just right with those pointy little bones that could kill you, and the barest hint of Hellmann's mayonnaise. If you save room and you can get the waiter's attention before he breathes down your neck with the check, you can get a plate of buttery chocolate rugelach, just like your grandfather used to bring every Sunday from that bakery in the Bronx.

It is at Krupin's, on occasional Sundays, more occasional than they used to be as we get promoted and have more babies and move farther out into the suburbs, that we are called home.

APPENDIX C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Suzanne Borenzweig
9307 Sudbury Road
Silver Spring, MD 20901

October 2007

Dear Advanced Placement English Teacher,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that explores the experiences of Advanced Placement English teachers in public high school. I am conducting this study as a doctoral student in Curriculum Theory and Development in the Department of Education Policy Studies (EDPS) at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand what it is like to teach Advanced Placement (AP) English—a college-level, exam-driven course—to high school students in a high school building. I will be exploring the fundamental question: **What is it like to teach Advanced Placement English while caught in the tension between teaching and testing?** It is my hope that you will join me in a multifaceted journey to investigate the complexities of this question, as well as other questions that arise through our discussions and reflective writing.

To gain insight to the authentic experiences of teaching and learning with our students in the AP English classroom, I will ask you to participate in two individual conversations with me, as well as two group conversations with me and five of your colleagues between October 2007 and February 2008. I will audiotape and transcribe our conversations, keeping all tapes and transcriptions, as well as your identity, confidential. We will meet in mutually convenient locations at mutually convenient times. I will also request that you write four entries in an informal, reflective journal during the research gathering process; I will provide optional writing prompts.

I am interested in setting up initial conversations for October 2007, and completing the study by February 2008. If you would like more information, or would like to participate in the study, please contact me at sbore@starpower.net, or (301) 587-8085. It is my hope that the insights brought forth by this research will be used to guide and inform curricular, policy, and other important pedagogical decisions pertaining to the Advanced Placement English program in public schools.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Suzanne Borenzweig

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title

PASSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Why is this research being done?

This is a research project being conducted by Suzanne Borenzweig at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are currently teaching Advanced Placement English in public high school. The purpose of this research project is to explore the lived experience of teachers as they engage with students, colleagues, curriculum, and College Board examinations in Advanced Placement English in public high school. We hope to better understand the curricular complexities of teaching an exam-driven, college-level course to high school students in a high school setting.

What will I be asked to do?

The procedures involve participating in at least two individual conversations for 45-60 minutes, two group conversations for 60-90 minutes, and writing fours entries in a reflective journal throughout the duration of the study. The study will begin in October 2007 and continue through February 2008. All conversations will be taped and transcribed. We will meet in locations convenient to your workplace. For the reflective journal entries, participants will be encouraged to write from topics generated through individual and group conversations, and/or choose from prompts, such as the following:

- Tell the story of how you became an AP English teacher.
- What advice would you give to a beginning AP English teacher?
- Generate a list of truths and a list of myths about teaching AP English in public high school.
- Tell about a favorite or inspirational teacher from your own schooling.

Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title

PASSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

What about confidentiality?

We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, all audiotapes, transcriptions, and reflective journals will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's residence. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible, unless otherwise desired. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed following the completion of this project.

___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

___ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about teaching Advanced Placement English in public high school. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the curricular and pedagogical complexities of teaching college-level, exam-driven Advanced Placement English courses to public high school students.

Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. You may also refuse to answer any questions at any time during the interviews.

Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title	PASSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL
What if I have questions?	This research is being conducted by Suzanne Borenzweig at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Francine Hultgren at: 3112A Benjamin Building, 301-405-4562, or fh@umd.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678** *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*
**Statement of Age of Subject and Consent [*Please note: Parental consent always needed for minors.]*	Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Signature and Date ***[Please add name, signature, and date lines to the final page of your consent form]***	**NAME OF SUBJECT**	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

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